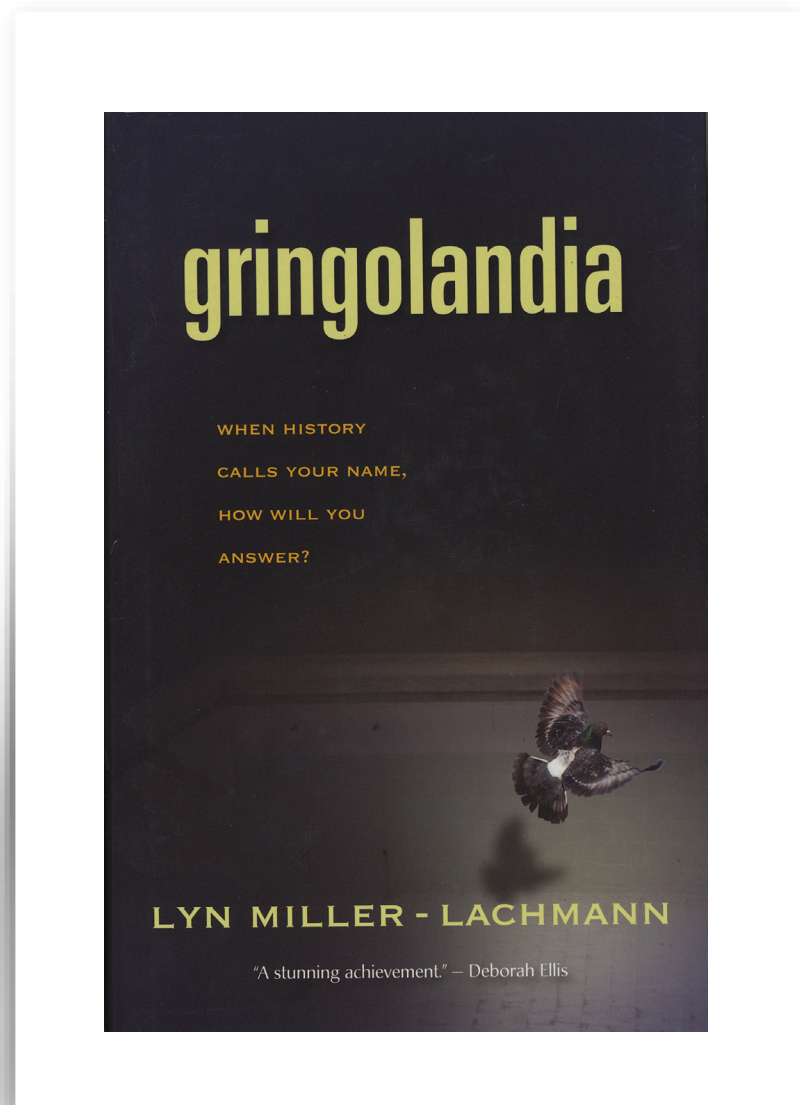


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teaching latin america through literacy



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Educator's Guide

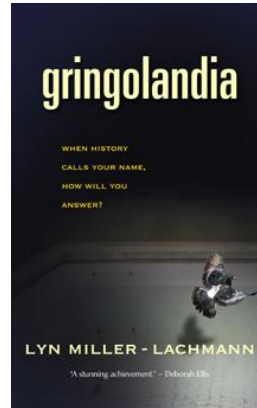
Gringolandia

Written by Lyn Miller-Lachmann

Published by Curbstone Books, 2009

ISBN: 9781931896498

Age Level: 14 and up



BOOK SUMMARY

Daniel's papá, Marcelo, used to play soccer, dance the cueca, and drive his kids to school in a beat-up green taxi—all while publishing an underground newspaper that exposed Chile's military regime. After papá's arrest in 1980, Daniel's family fled to the United States. Now Daniel has a new life, playing guitar in a rock band and dating Courtney, a minister's daughter. He hopes to become a US citizen as soon as he turns eighteen. When Daniel's father is released and rejoins his family, they see what five years of prison and torture have done to him. Marcelo is partially paralyzed, haunted by nightmares, and bitter about being exiled to "Gringolandia." Daniel worries that Courtney's scheme to start a bilingual human rights newspaper will rake up papá's past and drive him further into alcohol abuse and self-destruction. Daniel dreams of a real father-son relationship, but he may have to give up everything simply to save his papá's life. This powerful coming-of-age story portrays an immigrant teen's struggle to reach his tortured father and find his place in the world.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:

- 2010 ALA Best Books for Young Adults
- 2010 Bank Street College of Education Best Children's Books of 2010
- 2010 Américas Award Honor Book
- IPPY Gold Medal

AUTHOR'S CORNER

About Lyn Miller-Lachmann:

Lyn Miller-Lachmann has been involved in Latin American cultural organizations since 1984 and was the editor-in-chief of *MultiCultural Review* from 1994 to 2010. She is currently the assistant host of “Los Vientos del Pueblo,” a weekly bilingual program of Latin American and Spanish music, poetry, and history on WRPI-FM (decoloresreviews.blogspot.com). She also serves as an editor at the newly-established literature review website “De Colores: The Raza Experience in Books for Children.” For Gringolandia, she received a work-in-progress award for A Contemporary Young Adult Novel, given by the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators.

A little more about the author in her own words:

I grew up in Houston, Texas but left at age 18 to attend Princeton University, where I met my husband, Richard Lachmann. After living in Connecticut, New York City, and Wisconsin, we settled in upstate New York. We have two children, Derrick and Maddy Lachmann.



I love teaching as much as writing and have taught middle and high school English, social studies, and Jewish studies. I currently teach American Jewish History to seventh graders at Congregation Gates of Heaven in Schenectady, New York and run a playwriting elective for fourth to seventh graders.

I have lots of different hobbies because I love trying new things. In 2007 I became the assistant host of "Los Vientos del Pueblo" a bilingual program of Latin American and Spanish music, poetry, and history that currently airs on WRPI-FM, the official radio station of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, on Sundays from 2-6 pm ET. I also DJ parties, which I really like because I'm kind of awkward at parties (if you see me dancing next to you, watch out for your feet!), but DJ'ing gives me something to do and I can make sure everyone has a good time.

My husband and I enjoy traveling around the world. If I put a pin on a map for every place I've been, the map would have lots of pins. I've always wondered what it would be like to live in another place and time, and that's one of the reasons I write historical fiction.

Check out [Lyn Miller-Lachmann's website](#) for more information about the author.

**USING
GRINGO-
LANDIA
IN THE
CLASSROOM**

Gringolandia isn't a story easily forgotten, and it shouldn't be. As an adult with a Master's degree in Latin American Studies, the practice of torturing and disappearing political dissidents as a means of social control during violent dictatorships wasn't new to me. Yet I was still gripped by the novel, finding myself thinking about it days after I'd finished it. For young adult readers I think *Gringolandia* would be an incredibly powerful and moving book. Not only does it give voice to a historical period in a country not often taught about in the classroom, but I believe it also asks readers to think quite deeply about how we determine what is right or wrong and how we judge and make sense of the world around us.

The story is largely told from Daniel's point of view, with alternating shorter sections told from the point of view of Daniel's father, Marcelo, and Daniel's girlfriend, Courtney. It begins in 1986 in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship when Marcelo is beaten and arrested in the middle of the night in front of Daniel and his mother. The next section describes the torture Marcelo endured during the following six years of his imprisonment. The remaining bulk of the book covers the period six years later, when Marcelo is released and reunited with his family who fled to the United States after his arrest. Not surprisingly, everyone has changed during those six years. Daniel's father has been irreparably scarred both physically and emotionally by the torture. Daniel has adapted quite well to life in the United States, to the seeming disappointment of his father, who critically refers to the U.S. as Gringolandia.

Daniel, his mother, his father, and his sister must learn what it means to be a family again. As I watched them struggle through this, I found myself asking what does it mean to be family? What will we do for family? Often times our students have these idealized versions of what family should be, and when theirs don't measure up they don't feel comfortable sharing their struggles, thus creating a vast disconnect between school and home. If Daniel hoped that everything would go back to the way it was before, he soon finds this isn't the case. Instead, he struggles to deal with a father who has become distant and angry, who turns to alcohol as a means of dealing with the torture that has permanently damaged him. My hope is that as students read, the space will be opened for them to share their own experiences.

Daniel seems to have successfully adapted to the U.S. He does well in school, plays in a rock band, and has a white girlfriend. As he watches his father suffer, he can't believe his father talks of returning to Chile after all that was done to him. One of the more powerful aspects of the book is watching as Daniel deals with the inner turmoil of his feelings towards his father. Part of him blames his father for choosing the actions that led to his torture and his family's exile, while part of him wants to be proud of his father's work, as so many others are. We're forced to consider the question, how do we determine what is the right thing to do? Or, as the book cover asks, "When history calls your name, how will you answer?" Fruitful discussion could come from asking students these questions. Daniel's relationship with his father is closely tied to his relationship with

his home country, Chile. He must come to terms with this own identity, and decide who he is.

Part of the power of the book lies in the variety of themes it raises. While there may be many quality books that look at family relations, alcoholism, or civic duty, I think *Gringolandia* is one of the most powerful books I've read that delves into those *and* explores both political refugeeism and torture. As I read the section that described Marcelo's torture, I couldn't help but be reminded of *Zero Dark Thirty*, the movie about the hunt for and assassination of Osama bin Laden that received so much publicity last year. I'm sure many of our students have also seen the movie. I'd be interested to hear their thoughts on torture after viewing the film, and then after reading *Gringolandia*—my guess is many would struggle to make sense of their differing responses to each. I believe this is part of what makes the story so gripping—it forces our students out of a black and white, clear cut understanding of the world, and makes them deal with those grey areas—Is torture ever okay? Can it ever be condoned? Why?

I couldn't agree more with the following from Horn Book: "Miller-Lachmann credits teen readers with the capacity to appreciate hard truths about international politics, the consequences of torture, complex family dynamics, and first loves....the nuanced relationship between Daniel and his father is beautifully delineated, and the overarching exploration of injustice and its costs gives the novel memorable heft."

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

- [Charlotte Richardson's review on Paper Tigers](#)
- [Kirkus Review](#)

If you're interested in hearing what the author herself has to say about the book, check out the following online interview:

- [Cynthia Leitic Smith interviews Lyn Miller-Lachmann](#)

Lastly, there's a video to accompany the novel:

- [Gringolandia Book Trailer](#)

**LESSON
PLANS
& ACTIVITIES**

The following lesson plans are comprised of two sections:

- A short section of suggested activities that can be used before, during or after the reading of the novel which are organized thematically by different subject areas
- 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 excellent curricula written by the author herself:

- [A Teacher's Guide to *Gringolandia*](#) (contains background information, discussion questions and activities, and an annotated resource list that includes books, DVDs, web sites, and a video game.)
- [A Bundle of Letters](#)

Common Core Standards Addressed:

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.

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.

Social Studies and History

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.

Social Protest Art--Chilean Arpilleras:

In the book, Daniel's father, Marcelo, is arrested for his work in protesting the Pinochet dictatorship and his documentation of its human rights abuses. While Marcelo's work focused on publishing the clandestine newspaper, *Justicia*, there were also other types of protest movements. The women's social movement in Chile was quite powerful in protesting the dictatorship. Lachmann alludes to this when Courtney participates in the Clean Hands March. One part of this movement was the creation of arpilleras, which are layers of sackcloth or burlap fabric (arpillera) that were joined, principally through applique, to create multi-dimensional (in layers and meaning) works of protest and resistance. There are a number of excellent resources available for teaching about the history and role of the arpilleras, which would be an excellent way to expand the study of *Gringolandia* into other subject areas. These materials offer great overviews of the political and social history of the time, providing great background information for students. Using the resources listed below, have students research the Chilean Arpilleras.

- "Stitching Truth: Women's Protest Art in Pinochet's Chile" includes a series of readings and comprehension questions to help students learn both about the history of Chile and the use of art as a form of political protest. Facing History and Ourselves has also provided complementary lesson plans on their website. You can access both "Stitching Truth: Women's Protest Art in Pinochet's Chile" and the complementary lesson plans at <http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/publications/bordando-la-verdad-arte-de->
- YouTube also has a 5 minute [trailer of the film](#) *Threads of Hope*. Shot on location in Chile, Donald Sutherland narrates this moving portrait of the Chilean women who defied Pinochet's dictatorship armed only with sewing needles and scraps of cloth from the

clothes of their “disappeared” loved ones.

- We created a set of supplementary materials to use with the Facing History materials listed above. This packet includes a short overview and introduction to the relevant themes and topics raised through the readings and lessons such as: politics and authoritarianism, women and community, abductions and desaparecidos (the disappeared ones), human rights and exile, and significant events after 1990. These materials provide an important overview for teachers preparing to implement the lesson plans and readings in their classrooms. In addition to the introductory materials, you will also find activities created around some of the readings in the “Stitching Truth: Women’s Protests Art in Pinochet’s Chile”, including a poetry activity. There’s also a list of books organized by reading level to support teaching about Chile, along with a list of relevant films. Click [here](#) to access this supplementary packet.
- For a comparison of the Chilean Arpilleras and African American Quilts, check out the supplementary materials: [“Comparing Herstories: The Arpilleras of Chile and African American Quilters in the U.S.”](#)
- For lesson plans to help in creating your own arpillera, see [Stitching in the Classroom: Creating a Simplified Arpillera](#)
- While not specifically about Chile, Teaching Tolerance created lesson plans on the [Madres de Plaza de Mayo](#). This women’s social protest movement in Argentina has many similarities to the protest movement in Chile.

Torture—is it ever okay?

An important theme throughout the book is the topic of torture. Marcelo’s prolonged torture during the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile radically changes the lives of his entire family. When reading about Marcelo, it’s easy for students to denounce any practice of torture. However, it may become more complicated for students if you were to ask them the same question after viewing the popular movie, *Zero Dark Thirty*. Many may feel that in the case of fighting terrorism, the United States can legitimately practice torture. Discuss as a class the ethics of torture—is it ever okay? When? How? Who makes these decisions? It may be helpful to guide students in thinking about how we create our theories of justice. John Rawls, the well-known philosopher of ethics and morality, suggests that we create a theory of justice by first taking on the “veil of ignorance” imagining that we can start over with a new operating theory of justice. The significance of the veil of ignorance is that when creating our theory of justice by which society will operate, we have no idea where we are placed in the social hierarchy of race, class, gender, etc. We may very well be at the very bottom. Imagining that is the case, we must consider what principles do we want in place to protect us? Ask students to consider Rawls’ proposal—if we were to find ourselves at the bottom of the bottom, what societal, governmental, etc. protections would we want in place? Then, return to the discussion of torture and hold a class debate on the

question, is torture ever an acceptable practice? As many students will connect torture to terrorism, it may be helpful to consider taking class time to discuss terrorism. Rethinking Schools created a number of teaching resources on the topic. Download the entire pdf of [War, Terrorism, and our Classrooms](#) or use the two most applicable articles [“What is Terrorism? Who are the Terrorists?”](#) and [“Whose Terrorism?”](#)

Refugees and Immigration:

Immigration has been a heated topic for a number of years now, and more than likely will continue to be highly debated. Often left out of the discussion or debate is why such large numbers of people attempt to immigrate from Latin America. The film *Harvest of Empire*, based on the book by Juan González, looks at this very issue—going country by country through Latin America looking at how U.S. economic and military interests contributed to dramatically increasing numbers in immigration. In *Gringolandia* students see how the Chilean military influenced significant numbers of Chileans to immigrate to the U.S. What is not mentioned in the novel is the role of the U.S. and the infamous School of the Americas in many of these military dictatorships. In the article [Backyard Terrorism](#) by George Monbiot, Rethinking Schools introduces students to the School of the Americas and its role in Latin America. Have students watch the film, read the article and then discuss the factors that contributed to Latino immigration to the U.S. The film does include some graphic images, so previewing the film to be sure of grade level appropriateness is encouraged.

Guided Reading Questions

Part One | Pages 1-15

1. How does Daniel describe his father? (p. 4)
2. What reasoning does the soldier give Daniel for how they’ve treated his father? (p. 5-6)
3. From whose point of view is the first chapter written?
4. How long is Marcelo’s sentence? (p. 8)
5. What information did Marcelo disseminate through his taxi? (p. 9-10)
6. Does it sound like the guards care about Marcelo’s well-being? How do you know? What do the guards want Marcelo for? (p. 9)
7. Who takes care of Marcelo when he is injured during the interrogations? (p. 10)
8. From whose point of view is the second half of part one told?

Part Two | Pages 17-61

1. How long was Marcelo imprisoned? How do you know? (p. 19)
2. Think about how Daniel describes his father at the beginning of the book (p. 4). How does his father look now? How has he changed? (p. 20-21)
3. In Part Two Marcelo is now referred to as Papá again. Why is this? Think about whose point of view is being used.
4. What is the significance of the clenched fist salute? What does it mean? (p. 22)

5. Describe how Papá responds when Daniel tells him about his music? (p. 26-27)
6. What can you infer from Papá's behavior in the car ride about what he thinks about America? Support your answer with details from the story.
7. Papá shocks both Mamá and Daniel in the car ride home. What does he tell them that surprises them both? (p. 28)
8. Why do you think Papá would want to return to Chile? Would you? Why or why not?
9. Why can't Daniel return to Chile now? Does anyone in his family know this? (p. 28)
10. What do you think Daniel means when he thinks "Or sort of returning" when Courtney asks him about his father? (p. 30)
11. How does the conversation between Papá and the rest of the family go? How does Tina respond to her father's return? (p. 33-35)
12. How does Daniel explain Papá's obsession with always wearing the wool cap? Why do you think Papá wears it? (p. 40)
13. Right before the interview, Papá tells Daniel "Your education has been neglected. . . Today it officially begins." Thinking about what Papá shares in the interview, explain what this statement means. (p. 46-51)
14. Daniel feels a great deal of turmoil over his feelings around Papá, especially after the interview. What is causing the conflict? How would you feel if you were Daniel? Support your answer. (Hint: He wants to think of him as a hero, but he's also upset over all of the time they've missed as a family because of Papá's political activism.) (p. 51)
15. Why do you think that Daniel and Courtney respond so differently to Papá's interview on the radio? Explain (p. 54-55)
16. Why does Tina want to go with Papá on his speaking tour? (p. 58) Why do you think that Tina has had such a hard time adapting? Explain your answer.
17. Describe how Daniel deals with his father's screaming and drunkenness. What does he do when he hears these things? Do you think this helps? What would you do? (p. 54, 61)

Part Three | Pages 62-123

1. Whose point of view is used to tell part three? (p. 65)
2. How did Daniel and Courtney meet? (p. 65-66)
3. The author is alluding to something when she includes the following: "Back in Michigan, they called my father Andres. Spanish for Andrew. And my mother, Alicia. Everyone else knew them as Drew and Alice. 'Please be careful, Dad,' I said. I probably shouldn't have said anything, but I didn't want to have to move again" (p. 67). The reference will be explained later, but predict what you think this is about in relation to Courtney's family. Explain your answer.
4. Compare and contrast how Courtney and Daniel respond to Papá's arrival in the U.S. What possibilities does Courtney see for Papá? Why do you think their responses are so different?

5. What happens when Daniel picks Tina up from middle school? What did the student write on Tina's notebook? What does this mean? (p. 76-78)
6. When Courtney meets with Gregorio and Patricio what does she find out about Papá's articles? (p. 88-89)
7. Why does Courtney want to visit Boston—it's not just to see her brother, she has ulterior motives. What are they? (p. 91)
8. How did they disseminate *Justicia* in Chile since it was illegal? (p. 94)
9. How does Papá respond to the man's question about the advocating or promoting violence against those who were spying for the government in Chile? Do you agree with his response? (p. 100-101)
10. How does Courtney finally hear the story of what happened to Papá in Chile? (p. 109-111)
11. What does Dan reveal about Courtney's family's past in Michigan? What were they involved in? (p. 114, 116-121)
12. Why did Courtney's family have to leave Michigan? (p. 120)

Part Four | Pages 124-256

1. From whose point of view is part four written? (p. 126)
2. What do you think of Courtney's statement, "If you don't care about getting rejected, it means you haven't been putting your heart into your writing"? (p. 129) Do you think that's true? Could you apply it to things other than writing?
3. What article gets published first? What does Courtney re-name it? Think about Mamá's reaction when she starts reading and how Papá won't let Daniel or Courtney read it. (p. 137-140) Draw conclusions: What do you think the article is about? (Hint: think about some of Papá's experiences while being tortured in Chile).
4. Why doesn't Papá want Tina to read the articles? What does he hope she'll be able to do one day? (p. 142)
5. What happens at the committee meeting—what do the committee members say that Courtney has done? (p. 151)
6. Did Courtney make up the articles? Where did she get the information? (154-156)
7. How does Papá respond when he finds out what Courtney did? (p. 159-160)
8. How does Papá change after he hears of his friend's death? Is this how Daniel expected him to react? (p. 168-169)
9. What was the plan that Papá had with Pato? Who's going to help him return to Chile now? (p. 171-172)
10. How does Daniel respond to Courtney's plan to accompany them to Chile? (p. 181-182)
11. What does Daniel finally realize about the night he was arrested? What does he learn from listening to the tape? (p. 183-184)
12. Summarize the story that Courtney has created for their visit to Chile. Do you think it will work? (p. 185-187)
13. How does Mamá act toward Daniel once he decides to go? Why do you think she does this? (p. 196)

14. Do the soldiers at the Chilean airport believe Courtney's story? (p. 207)
15. Imagine you are Papá, how do you think he felt, waiting in the airport being questioned by the police? What thoughts do you think went through his mind?
16. When Daniel's helping the band set up, he overhears them talking about someone he resembles. Who is it? (p. 212)
17. Where are they taking Papá to drop him off? (p. 219, 220)
18. What do Courtney and Daniel read at the cathedral? What do they learn? (p. 220-223)
19. What does Papá want for Daniel? (p. 228-229)
20. What does Daniel find out is going to happen at the march? What does he do? How does he get injured? (p. 238-243)
21. What happens between Courtney and Daniel after the march? What has changed about Daniel? (p. 244-247)
22. What work will Papá be doing in Chile now? (p. 250)

Part Five | Pages 257-272

1. What does Daniel find out on October 5, 1988? Where is he when he hears the news? (p. 258)
2. How is Papá? Did he survive the dictatorship? What will he do now? (p. 260-261)
3. Does Daniel return to Chile? What does he do there? (p. 261)
4. Papá writes an essay for Daniel—"A Bird Named Pablo: A Metaphor". Re-read this section (p. 264-272). Think about the story of Papá and Daniel's life. Why do you think Papá wrote this for Daniel? What is the story a metaphor of?

**Reflective
Writing
Questions**

1. How would you describe Daniel's identity development over the course of the book? Analyze how Daniel changes from the beginning to the end. What is his relationship to Chile like at the beginning? And at the end? Use examples from the text to support your answer, and be sure to include the events that you believe had the most impact on how and why Daniel changed.
2. Daniel's relationship with his father is quite distant throughout much of the book. How would you describe their relationship by the end? Why does their relationship change? Does Daniel change in order for them to be closer? What about his father?
3. Daniel's father is very critical of Gringolandia, how does Daniel feel about Gringolandia? Do his feelings stay the same throughout the book or do they change? If they change, how do they change and why do they change?
4. What would you have done if you were Marcelo—would you have continued to print the paper knowing it may put you and your family in danger? Or, would you have remained silent, not protesting the human rights abuses of the dictatorship?
5. Torture—is it ever acceptable? Choose a position and support your answer.

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 LAII, **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. This guide was prepared by Katrina Dillon, LAII Project Assistant.

To complement this guide, the LAII 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>.