

**An Educator's Guide to Latin American Literature
"One of These Days" / "Un día de estos"**

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide accompanies a short story by a Latin American author. It was produced by Sheena Chakeres on behalf of the Latin American and Iberian Institute (LAI) at The University of New Mexico as part of a series of lessons for high school English students or advanced Spanish language students. The purpose of these lessons is to expose students to the voices of Latin American and how their stories relate to the political history of the region.

ABOUT THE LAI

The LAI is an interdisciplinary resource center at The University of New Mexico. As part of its mission to promote a better understanding of Latin America among diverse constituents, it develops curriculum materials and related resources for teaching about Latin America in the K-12 classroom. To learn more about other classroom resources produced by the LAI, visit the [LAI website](#).

WHY THIS STORY

Gabriel García Márquez is a big name in Latin American literature, but many of his stories are quite long for single or 2-day lessons. *One of These Days* is an exception, as it is short enough to fit well into a single day. Not only does Márquez manage to pack several symbolic elements into this story (the vultures, the spiderweb, the old dentist's office), he also makes a powerful statement about corruption in a small town.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The text of the chapter in question, "One of These Days," and its Spanish translation, "Un día de estos," are included at the end of this document under educational, fair use guidelines.



Title: "One of These Days" / "Un día de estos" published within the collection of short stories titled *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* (1962)

By: Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez

Translated to the English by Sheena Chakeres

SUMMARY:

A humble dentist, Aurelio Escovar, lives in a town riddled with corruption. When the murderous mayor arrives in his office, the dentist refuses to treat him. The mayor pulls a gun on the dentist and demands treatment for what Escovar discovers to be an infected wisdom tooth. He agrees to treat him, but without the aid of anesthesia saying, "Now you'll pay for twenty dead men."

LANGUAGE LEVEL:

Grades 10-12 / Spanish III, IV, AP

THEMES & LITERARY ELEMENTS:

Corruption, government, revenge, justice

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To expose students to Latin American literature
- 2) To expand students' vocabulary base
- 3) To develop students' literacy skills, in English and/or Spanish
- 4) To explore the genre of Magical Realism as political commentary

APPLICABLE STANDARDS

The English Language Arts Common Core Standards mirror the current Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (see [Skills Map](#)). Both encourage a long sequence of language study in grades K–12 to promote a high level of literacy and communication ability.

COMMON CORE STATE → READING LITERATURE → Grades 11-12

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1](#)

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2](#)

Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3](#)

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4](#)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

FOREIGN LANGUAGE FOR THE 21st CENTURY → Advanced

CRITICAL THINKING & PROBLEM SOLVING

Students as inquirers frame, analyze, and synthesize information as well as negotiate meaning across language and culture in order to explore problems and issues from their own and different perspectives.

INFORMATION LITERACY

Students as informed global citizens access, manage, and effectively use culturally authentic sources in ethical and legal ways.

SOCIAL & CROSSCULTURAL SKILLS

Students as adept language learners understand diverse cultural perspectives and use appropriate socio-linguistic skills in order to function in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts.

LESSON PLAN FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

Pre-reading

This guide introduces a simple 1-day lesson with questions built into the text. It is better not to give too much of the story away. Instead, ask students to sit in a circle, which is always a great change if they typically sit in rows. Introduce the author.

Reading

Popcorn reading, or randomly calling on students to read certain sections aloud) will keep students engaged, because they won't know when they are about to be called on to read. Check in after each paragraph to ask comprehension questions imbedded in their reading worksheet.

Post-reading

Use the discussion questions below to begin a conversation about what the story may represent.

LESSON PLAN FOR SPANISH TEACHERS

Pre-reading

Unlike some of the other lessons provided here, this guide is a simple 1-day lesson with questions built into the text. It is better to not give too much of the story away. Have students resituate themselves in a circle, which is always a nice change if they typically sit in rows. Introduce the author and go over the vocabulary list with students.

Reading

You will read the story three times. First, popcorn read with your class, calling on random students at random times to keep them engaged. Second, have them read the story in pairs, filling in any additional vocabulary words that they may need to understand. Also, ask them to highlight details that they think are important to character development. Finally, assign paragraphs to each pair and read together, checking in after each section to ask questions (see worksheet.)

Post-reading

Below you will find a discussion guide with key terms. After the reading check, ask students to look at the questions and choose one that sounds like a good starting point for a discussion.

One Of These Days

Gabriel García Márquez

Monday dawned warm and rainless. Aurelio Escovar, a dentist without a degree, and a very early riser, opened his office at six. He took some false teeth, mounted in their plaster mold, out of the glass case and put on the table a handful of instruments which he arranged from biggest to smallest, as if they were on display. He wore a collarless striped shirt, closed at the neck with a golden button, and pants held up by elastic suspenders. He was stiff and skinny, with a look that rarely corresponded to the situation, like the gaze of a deaf person.

When he had things arranged on the table, he pulled the drill toward the dental chair and sat down to polish the false teeth. He seemed not to be thinking about what he was doing, but worked steadily, pumping the drill with his feet, even when he didn't need it.

After eight he stopped for a while to look at the sky through the window, and he saw two pensive buzzards who were drying themselves in the sun on the ridgepole of the house next door. He went on working with the idea that before lunch it would rain again. The shrill voice of his eleven-year-old son interrupted his concentration.

“Papa.”

“What?”

“The Mayor wants to know if you'll pull his tooth.”

“Tell him I'm not here.”

He was polishing a gold tooth. He held it at arm's length, and examined it with his eyes half closed. From the small waiting room, his son shouted again.

“He says you are, too, because he can hear you.”

The dentist kept examining the tooth. Only when he had finished his work and put it on the table did he say:

“Even better.”

He returned to the drill. He took several pieces of a bridge out of a cardboard box where he kept the things he still had to do and began to polish the gold.

“Papa.”

“What?” He still hadn’t changed his expression.

“He says if you don’t take out his tooth, he’ll shoot you.”

Without hurrying, with an extremely calm movement, he stopped pedaling the drill, pushed it away from the chair, and pulled the lower drawer of the table all the way out. There was a revolver.

“Alright,” he said. “Tell him to come and shoot me.”

He rolled the chair over opposite the door, his hand resting on the edge of the drawer. The Mayor appeared at the door. He had shaved the left side of his face, but the other side, swollen and aching, had a five-day-old beard. The dentist saw the many nights of desperation in his languished eyes. He closed the drawer with his fingertips and said softly:

“Sit down.”

“Good morning,” said the Mayor.

“Morning,” said the dentist.

While the instruments were boiling, the Mayor leaned his skull on the headrest of the chair and felt better. His breath was icy. It was a humble office: an old wooden chair, the pedal drill, a glass case with ceramic bottles. Opposite the chair was a window with a shoulder-high cloth curtain. When he felt the dentist approach, the Mayor braced his heels and opened his mouth.

Aurelio Escovar turned his head toward the light. After inspecting the infected tooth, he closed the Mayor’s jaw with careful pressure from his fingers.

“It has to be without anesthesia,” he said.

“Why?”

“Because you have an abscess.”

The Mayor looked him in the eye. “All right,” he said, and tried to smile.

The dentist did not smile back. He brought the basin of sterilized instruments to the worktable and took them out of the water with a pair of cold forceps, still without hurrying. Then he pushed the spittoon with the tip of his shoe, and went to wash his hands in the washbasin. He did all this without looking at the Mayor. But the Mayor didn't take his eyes off him. It was a lower wisdom tooth.

The dentist spread his legs and grasped the tooth with the hot forceps. The Mayor seized the arms of the chair, braced his feet with all his strength, and felt an icy void in his kidneys, but didn't make a sound. The dentist moved only his wrist. Without rancor, rather with a bitter tenderness, he said:

“Now you'll pay for our twenty dead men.”

The Mayor felt the crunch of bones in his jaw, and his eyes filled with tears. But he didn't breathe until he felt the tooth come out. Then he saw it through his tears. It seemed so foreign to his pain that he failed to understand his torture of the five previous nights. Bent over the spittoon, sweating, panting, he unbuttoned his tunic and reached for the handkerchief in his pants pocket. The dentist gave him a clean cloth.

“Dry your tears,” he said.

The Mayor did so. He was trembling. While the dentist washed his hands, he saw the crumbling ceiling and a dusty spider web with spider's eggs and dead insects. The dentist returned, drying his hands.

“Go to bed,” he said, “and gargle with salt water.”

The Mayor stood up, said goodbye with a contemptuous military salute, and walked toward the door, stretching his legs, without buttoning up his tunic.

“Send the bill,” he said.

“To you or the town?”

The Mayor didn’t look at him. He closed the door and, through the screen, said:

“It’s the same damn thing.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Márquez begin with such detailed descriptions of the office and the dentist?
2. What can we infer about the dentist based on these descriptions?
3. What other details about the scene catch your attention? What do you think they symbolize?
 - a. The dentist’s clothing
 - b. The buzzards
 - c. The spiderweb
 - d. The son
 - e. The tooth
4. Why do you believe the dentist possesses a gun?
5. What political statements do you believe the author makes with the story?

Un día de estos

Gabriel García Márquez

El lunes amaneció tibio y sin lluvia. Don Aurelio Escovar, dentista sin título y buen madrugador, abrió su gabinete¹ a las seis. Sacó de la vidriera² una dentadura postiza³ montada aún en el molde de yeso y puso sobre la mesa un puñado de instrumentos que ordenó de mayor a menor, como en una exposición. Llevaba una camisa a rayas, sin cuello, cerrada arriba con un botón dorado, y los pantalones sostenidos con cargadores⁴ elásticos. Era rígido, enjuto⁵, con una mirada que raras veces correspondía a la situación, como la mirada de los sordos⁶.

Cuando tuvo las cosas dispuestas sobre la mesa rodó la fresa⁷ hacia el sillón de resortes y se sentó a pulir⁸ la dentadura postiza. Parecía no pensar en lo que hacía, pero trabajaba con obstinación, pedaleando en la fresa incluso cuando no se servía de ella.

Después de las ocho hizo una pausa para mirar el cielo por la ventana y vio dos gallinazos⁹ pensativos que se secaban al sol en el caballete de la casa vecina. Siguió trabajando con la idea de que antes del almuerzo volvería a llover. La voz destemplada de su hijo de once años lo sacó de su abstracción.

-Papá.

-Qué.

-Dice el alcalde que si le sacas una muela.

-Dile que no estoy aquí.

Estaba puliendo un diente de oro. Lo retiró a la distancia del brazo y lo examinó con los ojos a medio cerrar. En la salita de espera volvió a gritar su hijo.

¹ office

² glass case

³ set of false teeth

⁴ suspenders

⁵ extremely thin, gaunt

⁶ deaf

⁷ drill (dentistry)

⁸ to polish

⁹ vultures; buzzards

-Dice que sí estás porque te está oyendo.

El dentista siguió examinando el diente. Sólo cuando lo puso en la mesa con los trabajos terminados, dijo:

-Mejor.

Volvió a operar la fresa. De una cajita de cartón donde guardaba las cosas por hacer, sacó un puente de varias piezas y empezó a pulir el oro.

-Papá.

-Qué.

Aún no había cambiado de expresión.

-Dice que si no le sacas la muela te pega un tiro¹⁰.

Sin apresurarse¹¹, con un movimiento extremadamente tranquilo, dejó de pedalear en la fresa, la retiró del sillón y abrió por completo la gaveta¹² inferior de la mesa. Allí estaba el revólver.

-Bueno -dijo-. Dile que venga a pegármelo¹³.

Hizo girar el sillón hasta quedar de frente a la puerta, la mano apoyada en el borde de la gaveta. El alcalde apareció en el umbral¹⁴. Se había afeitado la mejilla izquierda, pero en la otra, hinchada y dolorida, tenía una barba de cinco días. El dentista vio en sus ojos marchitos muchas noches de desesperación. Cerró la gaveta con la punta de los dedos y dijo suavemente:

-Siéntese.

-Buenos días -dijo el alcalde.

-Buenos -dijo el dentista.

Mientras hervían los instrumentos, el alcalde apoyó el cráneo en el cabezal de la silla y se sintió mejor. Respiraba un olor glacial. Era un gabinete pobre: una vieja silla de madera, la fresa de pedal, y una vidriera con pomos de loza. Frente a la silla, una ventana con un cancel de tela hasta la altura de un hombre. Cuando sintió que el dentista se acercaba, el alcalde afirmó los talones y abrió la boca.

¹⁰ ...he will shoot you

¹¹ to rush or hurry

¹² drawer

¹³ "Tell him to come shoot me then."

¹⁴ doorstep

Don Aurelio Escovar le movió la cara hacia la luz. Después de observar la muela dañada, ajustó la mandíbula con una cautelosa presión de los dedos.

-Tiene que ser sin anestesia -dijo.

-¿Por qué?

-Porque tiene un absceso.

El alcalde lo miró en los ojos.

-Está bien -dijo, y trató de sonreír. El dentista no le correspondió. Llevó a la mesa de trabajo la cacerola con los instrumentos hervidos y los sacó del agua con unas pinzas frías, todavía sin apresurarse. Después rodó la escupidera¹⁵ con la punta del zapato y fue a lavarse las manos en el aguamanil¹⁶. Hizo todo sin mirar al alcalde. Pero el alcalde no lo perdió de vista.

Era una cordal inferior¹⁷. El dentista abrió las piernas y apretó la muela con el gatillo¹⁸ caliente. El alcalde se aferró a las barras de la silla, descargó toda su fuerza en los pies y sintió un vacío helado en los riñones¹⁹, pero no soltó un suspiro. El dentista sólo movió la muñeca. Sin rencor, más bien con una amarga ternura, dijo:

-Aquí nos paga veinte muertos, teniente.

El alcalde sintió un crujido de huesos en la mandíbula y sus ojos se llenaron de lágrimas. Pero no suspiró hasta que no sintió salir la muela. Entonces la vio a través de las lágrimas. Le pareció tan extraña a su dolor, que no pudo entender la tortura de sus cinco noches anteriores. Inclinado sobre la escupidera, sudoroso, jadeante²⁰, se desabotonó la guerrera²¹ y buscó a tientas el pañuelo en el bolsillo del pantalón. El dentista le dio un trapo limpio.

-Séquese las lágrimas -dijo.

¹⁵ spittoon

¹⁶ wash basin

¹⁷ lower wisdom tooth

¹⁸ forceps (also, trigger)

¹⁹ kidneys

²⁰ panting

²¹ chaqueta militar

El alcalde lo hizo. Estaba temblando. Mientras el dentista se lavaba las manos, vio el cielorraso desfondado y una telaraña polvorienta con huevos de araña e insectos muertos. El dentista regresó secándose las manos. “Acuéstese -dijo- y haga bucheros de agua de sal.” El alcalde se puso de pie, se despidió con un displicente saludo militar, y se dirigió a la puerta estirando las piernas, sin abotonarse la guerrera.

-Me pasa la cuenta -dijo.

-¿A usted o al municipio?

El alcalde no lo miró. Cerró la puerta, y dijo, a través de la red metálica.

-Es la misma vaina²².

DE DISCUSIÓN

1. En tu opinión, ¿por qué describe Márquez la oficina del dentista con tantos detalles?
2. ¿Qué se puede inferir del dentista?
3. ¿Cuáles son los otros detalles que añaden al cuento? ¿Qué podrían representar?
 - a. La ropa del dentista
 - b. Los gallinazos
 - c. La telaraña
 - d. El hijo
 - e. El diente
4. ¿Por qué piensas que el dentista posee un arma?
5. ¿Qué declaración política hace Márquez con este cuento?

²² “It’s the same damn thing.”