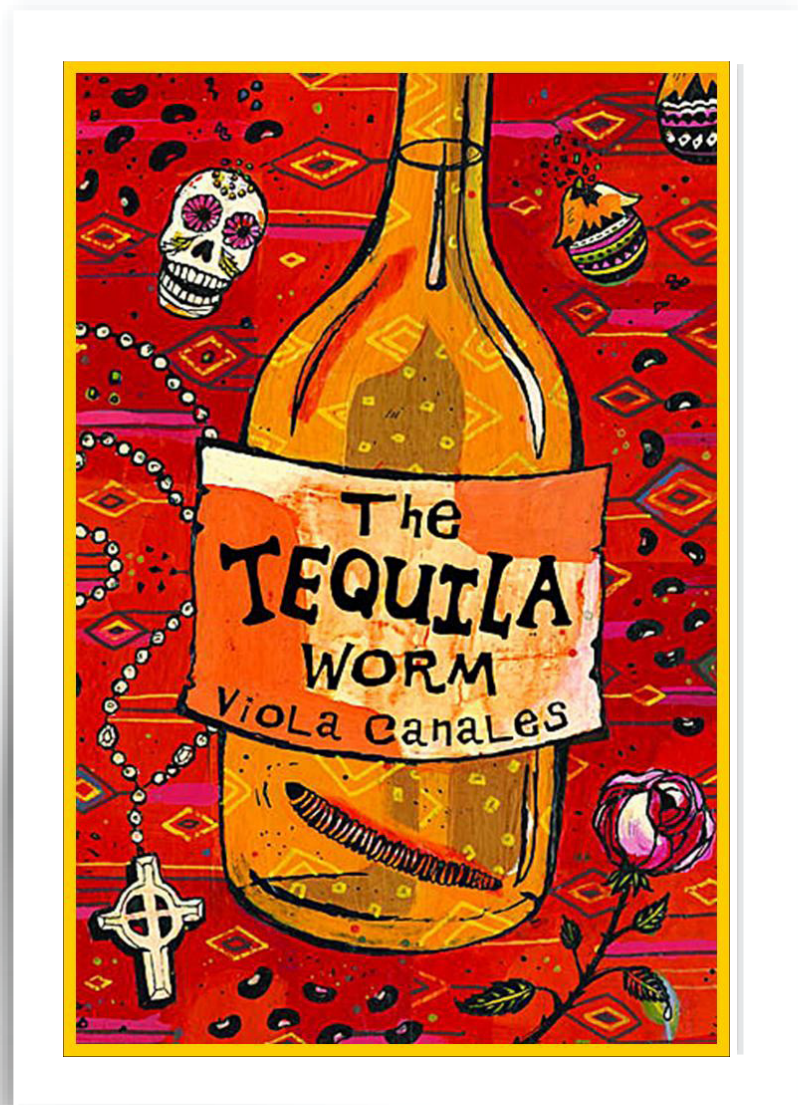


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teaching latin america through literacy



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Educator's Guide

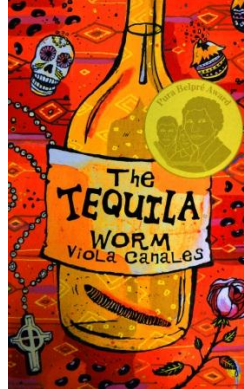
The Tequila Worm

Written by Viola Canales

Published by Wendy Lamb Books, 2005

ISBN: 9780375840890

Age Level: 12 and up



BOOK SUMMARY

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.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:

- Américas Award Honorable Mention 2005
- Pura Belpré Award for Writing, 2006
- 2006 ALSC Notable Children Book
- Judy Lopez Memorial Award Honor Book

AUTHOR'S CORNER

About Viola Canales:

Viola Canales is the author of the award-winning *The Tequila Worm*, a young adult novel published in 2007 by Random House. The novel has received considerable acclaim for its positive portrayal of Mexican-American culture, including being designated a Notable Book by the American Library Association, winning the Pura Belpré Medal for Narrative, and receiving the PEN Center USA Award. In 2012, the Spanish language version, *El Gusano de Tequila*, was released by KingCake Press.



In addition to *The Tequila Worm*, Canales has also published a collection of short stories titled *Orange Candy Slices and Other Secret Tales* (Piñata Books, 2001). According to the publisher, it is a series of tales inhabiting “the mysterious and secret land that lies between the United States and Mexico, between child and adulthood, reality and imagination, and between life and death. These haunting stories not only reveal, layer by layer, the fantastic in the ordinary, but, most importantly, the powerful and healing magic inside all of us.”

Most recently, Canales has expanded her repertoire into poetry with a bilingual book, *The Little Devil and the Rose: Lotería Poems // El diablito y la rosa: Poems de la lotería*, published by the University of Houston in 2014. Like her fiction, this poetic venture has been well received. Diego Baéz, a CantoMundo Fellow, has called it “a lively addition to Chicana literature.” Throughout her publications, readers can discern the influence of her family background and history. As she has forthrightly expressed in various interviews, Canales’ background was a combination of poverty and privilege, Mexican-American culture and Anglo practices, Spanish and English.

Much of her writing hints at how she came to realize and grapple with those disparities. In an authors’ description published by [Random House](#), she expresses that “her barrio felt so wonderfully rich with the magic and mystery of traditions, family, friends, and foods that she didn’t realize she was poor until she won at a scholarship at the age of 15” to attend a prestigious boarding school in Austin, Texas – far from family.

Perhaps it was during her time at the boarding school that Canales began to most firmly grasp the differences between the world in which she was raised and the wider world of preconceptions about Mexican-American culture. She has written that the school helped her by fostering “her lifelong love of literature” and introducing her to “another mundo.” At the same time, however, it also made her “so homesick that she started writing stories – to conjure up her family and the barrio that she missed so much” ([Random House Children’s Books](#)). Out of these different experiences, Canales began to plant the seeds which would become the warm and engaging stories which would later earn her accolades as a published author.

By actively drawing on her background, Canales' publications affirm the importance and richness of Mexican-American culture. Moreover, in actively counteracting negative representations of her people's culture and history, she has developed into a significant Chicana writer, particularly for young readers. She openly discusses this social justice aspect of her writing when, in a [Harvard Magazine article](#), she explains that she wrote *The Tequila Worm* in part to promote more positive representations of Mexican-American people – as well as to help people everywhere who are marginalized by mainstream society. “Even though this is a story of a Mexican-American girl,” she says of her work, “it is talking about people who are poor and who have come from outside communities, and about how the majority of society sees them and what they do with their rituals and traditions. We are so tired of stories of gangs and drugs. *The Tequila Worm* really celebrates the positive side of our culture—the family, the spirituality, the food, and the music.”

Although the excellence of her publications would suggest a lifetime dedicated to literature, hers has not been the typical career of an author. A graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, Canales has served as a field organizer for the United Farm Workers, an officer in the U.S. Army, a lawyer with a private firm in Los Angeles, and a presidential-appointment of the Small Business Administration under the Clinton Administration. When not spending time with her family in McAllen, Texas, she teaches courses at the Stanford Law School in Stanford, California. She also travels extensively to schools, colleges, libraries, and community centers to talk about her work and inspire other students to overcome obstacles and accomplish their dreams.

USING *The Tequila Worm* IN THE CLASSROOM

I needed this book. It was a pleasant break from the heaviness of the last two books we've featured, which isn't to say that it's insignificant or unimportant in any way. It's certainly not a 'fluff' book. It's incredibly moving and meaningful, yet there's still an air of lightness to it. It's infused with humor, even as you read some of the more serious sections. This is the kind of book that you find yourself smiling through, or maybe even laughing out loud.

I couldn't have asked for more perfect timing. We've spent the last two months holding a variety of workshops on teaching about *Día de los Muertos*. In all of these workshops we talk about the importance of avoiding the “holidays and heroes” or multicultural tourism approach to teaching about cultures and cultural traditions. Canales' book shows how this can be done. Through reading *The Tequila Worm* students learn about various celebrations and traditions, but there's a depth to it – these things are conceptualized within what it means to be a family and a member of a community. As teachers, we often have students research cultural traditions as class projects, but it can be difficult to do this in a way that's meaningful, or so that it doesn't come across as if it were written for a travel brochure. Canales' book offers a way to do this

because the traditions and rituals are contextualized within family relationships. In one article, Canales discusses her experiences and offers thoughts on the cultural importance of *The Tequila Worm*: “At one Texas reading for *The Tequila Worm*, a group of women were saying the most striking things, such as ‘I know there are a lot of Mexicans in Austin, but I didn’t not really understand the richness of the culture—and now I am feeling culture envy.’ Culture envy. . . That is where I want to go with this. I want people to weep for the destruction of the Ninth Ward in New Orleans and to weep for the music lost, the recipes, the warmth, and the magic lost, the creativity gone. I want them to feel the same appreciation for the Mexican-American culture” (p. 77).

I often talk about the books we feature as counter-narratives because I think this is such an important part of the need for diverse literature in the classroom. Too often I sat in the teachers’ lounge listening to colleagues talk about how the parents of our students of color just didn’t value education or family. This book shows just how wrong that misconception is. This is a story about a beautiful family whose love allows their children to become who they want to be, and in doing this prepares them to grapple with *el otro mundo* and still hold on to their own identity. It is a book that celebrates the unique and the eccentric that make us the individuals we are, but that also allow us to be a community that loves and supports one another.

When I read a book, I almost always have a favorite character, maybe one I identify with more, one who resonates with me, or one who just makes me laugh. I don’t with this novel. I loved every single one of Canales’ characters. Sofia’s relationship with her father is quite special, and it may be easier for students to see how important it is because it’s a little more overt. Yet her relationship with her mother, her little sister Lucy, and her best friend Berta are just as important to her ultimate success.

By the end of the book, Sofia understands the beauty, strength and importance of her family, their history, and their traditions, but this takes her some time to come to understand. It’s when she’s confronted with the cultural clash at Saint Luke’s boarding school that she comes to understand the value of her own community and what sets her apart from her peers. This is a necessary conversation that we need to be having in our classrooms, where too often the dominant culture is judged to be right or the best. Our students need to read stories that offer critiques of dominant culture, and show protagonists who critically and consciously evaluate this, and don’t necessarily go along with it.

While much of the story is based on Canales’ own childhood, the ending isn’t. The beautiful plaza that Sofia returns to doesn’t exist except in Canales’ imagination: “The *placito* is metaphorical. To change an outlook, you have to be shown something that is positive, that is beautiful. . . We all need a better world right now. America is stuck; it has lost its magic in life and people live life as work. I think we only start dreaming again with

myth and spirituality in our lives. Only then can we conjure up a better society” (p. 79). For me, Canales’ book is definitely a step in that direction.

If you'd like to read what others have thought about the book, check out the link to another review below:

- [Blog Critics](#)

If you're interested in learning more about the author, check out the following article/interview:

- [Harvard Magazine](#)

Lastly, here's a book trailer video to accompany the novel:

- [The Tequila Worm Slime Kids 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, see related curricula:

- [Study Guide created by Bobbi Mimmack](#)

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.

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 Studies

Cultural Celebrations and Traditions:

Numerous traditions and celebrations are highlighted in the novel *The Tequila Worm*. Two that play a more prominent role are the quinceañera and Día de los Muertos. Below we've highlighted different resources for teaching about both. These would be great extension activities to use once students have completed the novel.

Quinceañeras:

Guided Reading Questions

[En la Clase: Teaching About Quinceañeras](#)

In this blog post we highlight a number of available resources for teaching about quinceañeras, including literature resources, a unit for a Spanish class, and a unit for a comparative study of quinceañeras and Sweet 16s.

[Educator's Guide for Estrella's Quinceañera](#)

Here you'll find a guide to Malin Alegria's young adult novel, *Estrella's Quinceañera*, along with other materials to support teaching about quinceañeras.

Día de los Muertos:

[LAI Educator's Guide to Día de los Muertos](#)

Compiled by the Latin American & Iberian Institute, this extensive guide includes background information on Día de los Muertos, a bibliography of suggested readings, and activities based around reading, writing, and Guided Language Acquisition Development (GLAD) strategies.

[Vamos a Leer Día de los Muertos Posts](#)

Developed by the Latin American & Iberian Institute, our Vamos a Leer blog includes many resources relevant to teaching about Día de los Muertos, including reviews of children's books and young adult books, and classroom activities.

Chapter One: The Storyteller's Bag | Pages 1-5

1. Barrio is a Spanish word. What does it mean in English? (p. 1)
2. How did the barrio become one family? (p. 1)
3. Who is Dona Clara? Why does everyone look forward to her visits? (p. 1)
4. Describe what Dona Clara looks like. (p. 1-2)
5. Who is Sofia like? What does she have in common with this person? (p. 2)
6. Who is Berta like? What does she have in common with this person? (p.3)
7. When Clara visits the year Sofia is 6, what has changed about Clara? (p. 4)
8. What does Mama do when Clara can't tell her stories anymore? (p. 4)
9. What is a comadre? Do you know anyone like this? Who? Describe them. (p. 5)

Chapter Two: The Candy Bite | Pages 6-9

1. Why doesn't Sofia want to be friends with Berta anymore? (p. 6-7)
2. How does Mama respond when Sofia explains why she doesn't like Berta? What would you have done if you were Mama? Why? (p. 7)
3. The next day when Sofia sees Berta with a chocolate bar, what

happens? How do their mother's deal with it? (p. 8-9).

Chapter Three: The Holy Host | Pages 10-16

1. How old was Sofia when she made her First Communion? What did she practice with? (p. 10)
2. What does Sofia tell the little kids will happen if a nun dies? Do you think this is true? (p. 11)
3. What is the rule about eating and communion? (p. 12)
4. Why is the host so important, according to Sofia? What does Sofia think will happen if the host accidentally comes out of your mouth? Do you think this is what they really taught at catechism? Or, did Sofia misunderstand? (p. 13)
5. Do you think Berta knew that it was too close to communion for Sofia to take a bite of her chocolate bar? Why? Explain your answer. (p. 13)
6. What does Sofia do with her wafer? (p. 14)
7. How does Mama know that Sofia is hiding something? (p. 15)
8. How does Mama deal with the holy wafer in Sofia's shirt? (p. 16)

Chapter Four: Easter Cascarones | Pages 17-25

1. Why is Sofia's family eating so many eggs? What do they do with each egg? Does Mama have to do anything special to cook the eggs? (p. 17-18)
2. How many egg cartons does Sofia's family have when she thinks they've won? How many does Berta say her family has? If each carton is full, how many eggs have these two families eaten? (p. 18)
3. Is Sofia's father worried that they don't have enough eggs? (p. 19)
4. What do they do with the egg shells? (p. 19)
5. How does Sofia feel about 20 cartons of eggs after they've colored 5 of the cartons? (p. 21)
6. What does Papa surprise the girls with? How will this make coloring all the egg shells easier? (p. 22)
7. What does Papa fill the eggs with? What does Sofia fill her special egg with? (p. 22-23)
8. How do they cover the hole in each egg? (p. 23)
9. What are the egg shells called in Spanish? (p. 23)
10. Where does Sofia's family go after Mass to celebrate Easter? What kinds of foods do they prepare? Does your family celebrate Easter? If you do, how do you celebrate the holiday? (p. 24)
11. What do the grown-ups do with the *cascarones*? What do the children do with the *cascarones*? (p. 24)
12. What was in Sofia's secret egg? Who did she smash it on? What did Berta put in her secret egg? Who did Lucy's secret egg end up on? What was in it? (p. 25)
13. How does Sofia's attitude toward her sister change at the end of the story? Do you think she still wishes she had a big sister instead?

Chapter Five: Skulls and Quarters | Pages 26-35

1. What does *bruja* mean in English? What is the difference between a *curandera* and a *bruja*? What does a *curandera* do?
2. How did Sofia meet a *curandera* over the summer? What happened to Lucy that caused her to need a *curandera*? (p. 27)
3. Who is Belia? Why does this surprise Sofia? (p. 28)
4. What does Belia do to cure Lucy of *susto*? (p. 28)
5. Why does Sofia like Halloween so much? (p. 29)
6. How would you describe Mama's costume making? Explain your answer. (p. 29-30)
7. What does Sofia get in her Halloween bag? Why is she disappointed by this? What did Berta get the year before? (p. 30-31)
8. What does the other side of town look like on Halloween? What does Sofia see when she looks out the car window? (p. 31)
9. Where does Mama take Sofia the day after Halloween? What does Sofia learn about the skulls? What are they connected to? (p. 32)
10. Why did Virginia create an altar? What did she place on it? What tradition is this for?
11. What does Mama explain to Sofia about the altar? (p. 34)
12. How does Papa describe what he's going to show Sofia? What does Sofia see when he takes her to the cemetery? Why do you think Papa wants Sofia to see this? (p. 34-35)
13. Why does Sofia want to live on the other side of town? What does Papa say in response to this? (p. 35)

Chapter 6: Taco Head | Pages 35-40

1. What did Sofia take for lunch each day? What did Mama have to do to prepare this? What does Sofia really want to take for lunch? (p. 36)
2. Why doesn't Sofia want to take tacos for lunch? Have you ever heard anyone made fun of for their lunch? Did you do anything about it? How does Sofia avoid getting made fun of? (p. 37)
3. What happens on the day that Sofia gets called Taco Head? (p. 37-38)
4. What advice does Coach Clarke give Sofia? Do you think this is helpful advice? (p. 38)
5. Why do you think Coach Clarke asks Sofia to eat with her? What does she do to help Sofia solve her lunch problem? (p. 38-39)
6. What does Sofia learn about Coach Clarke? (p. 39)
7. What advice does Coach Clarke give Sofia about kicking? Does she encourage her to actually kick the girl who made fun of her? (p. 39-40)
8. How does Sofia 'kick' the girl who made fun of her? Do you think

this is good advice? Is it easy advice to follow when you're angry or hurt? Is it worth doing anyway? (p. 40)

Chapter 7: The Fancy School | Pages 41-49

1. Why does Sofia panic when she gets the note to see Mr. Thomas? What grade is Sofia in now? (p. 41)
2. What does Mr. Thomas tell Sofia? (p. 42)
3. What does Sofia think of the school when she sees the pamphlet? What is the one problem with this school? (p. 42-43) What do you think—would you go to a boarding school where you had to live away from your family? Why or why not?
4. What is Berta's response to the idea of the boarding school? How far away is Austin? What state is Austin in? (p. 44)
5. How does Sofia explain why she really wants to go?
6. What is *sobremesa*? What does Lucy share at *sobremesa*? Why does this make it harder for Sofia to share about the school? (p. 45-46)
7. How does Mama respond to the news about the boarding school? How does Papa respond to the news about the boarding school? Even though Mama and Papa talk about two different things, their responses have something in common, what? What types of things do they refer? (p. 47-48)
8. What does Papa say that he and Mama want for Sofia? How can Sofia get this? (p. 49)
9. What does Mama say will have to happen as part of the decision-making process? (p. 49)
10. What will be the hardest and scariest part of leaving for Sofia? (p. 49)

Chapter 8: My Plastic Tia | Pages 50-60

1. When Sofia takes the scholarship test, has her family made a decision about the boarding school? (p. 50)
2. How is Saint Luke's different from Sofia's high school? (p. 51-52)
3. What kinds of questions does Mr. Weld ask Sofia? (p. 51)
4. How much will Sofia's family have to pay for her to attend Saint Luke's? Does Mr. Weld think this is a lot of money? Does Sofia think this is a lot of money? What does this tell us about the differences between Mr. Weld's economic situation and Sofia's? (p. 52)
5. Compare how Sofia responds to Mr. Weld's presentation with how her family and Berta respond. Why do you think they respond differently? Where does Mama say they must go before they make a decision? (p. 53)
6. What is everything in Tia Petra's house wrapped in? Why does she do this? (p. 53-54)
7. Who is Tia Petra to Sofia? Why is it important that Sofia talk to Tia Petra about the scholarship to Saint Luke's? (p. 55-56)

8. How does Tia Petra explain to Sofia what education means? Is it just about school?
9. What does Tia Petra say it means to be a good *comadre*? (p. 56)
10. What statement is Tia Petra making when she wraps Sofia up in plastic? (p. 58)
11. What does Tia Petra say to Sofia and Berta when they're alone? What does Berta have to do in order to be Sofia's *comadre*? How does this conversation change how Sofia feels about Berta? (p. 59-60)

Chapter 9: Cleaning Beans | Pages 61-71

1. What does Papa do every Tuesday? (p. 61)
2. How does Papa clean the pound of pinto beans every week? How does this process make Papa feel? Is there you anything you do that makes you feel this way? (p. 62)
3. What does Papa teach Sofia about beans? What does he compare them to? (p. 62)
4. How does Papa cook the beans? (p. 63-64)
5. How do Papa and Sofia prefer their beans? (p. 64)
6. What does this exchange between Papa and Sofia tell you about her relationship with her father? How does it compare to your relationship with your father? (p. 62-64)
7. How is Mama different from Papa? Think about what she does when she gets comes home from the grocery. How does Mama like to cook beans? (p. 65-66)
8. Who is Sofia more like her Papa or her Mama? Explain. (p. 67-69)
9. What lesson about being a *comadre* does Papa teach Sofia? How will this help her convince Mama and Lucy to let her go to Saint Luke's? What must Sofia do to connect with Mama? (p. 68-71)

Chapter 10: The Drive-In | Pages 72-79

1. Describe Mama's routine at the drive-in. What are the typical things she does to prepare for watching the movie? (p. 73-74)
2. Sofia realizes that Berta has changed. How is Berta different now? (p. 74-75)
3. What does Berta think of the movie? How can you tell? How does this show that she and Sofia have changed? (p. 76-77)
4. As the movie ends, Sofia understands something about herself and what she wants—what is it? How are her wants different from Berta's or Mama's? (p. 78-79)

Chapter 11: Berta's Quinceañera | Pages 80-91

1. How can Sofia support Berta's dream? What can she do for her? (p. 81)
2. What deal do Berta and Sophia make? Make a prediction: Do you think Berta will be able to convince Mama to let Sofia go to Saint Luke's? (p. 82)

3. How does Berta's *quinceañera* help her to learn how to be a *comadre*? (p. 84)
4. What does Berta say that Sofia needs to do in order to prove to Mama that she should go to Saint Luke's? (p. 84-85)
5. What surprise is waiting for Sofia at the hotel? (p. 85-86)
6. Why does Papa teach Sofia to dance the lead to "Julia"? How does this help Sofia connect with her mother? (p. 86-89)
7. How are Sofia's and Berta's dreams connected? (p. 89-90)
8. What does Sofia feel once she has her parents' blessing to go? (p. 91) Make a connection: How would you feel about leaving your family to go away to school?

Chapter 12: Five "New" Dresses | Pages 92-100

1. What are Sofia's two big problems? Who is going to help her solve them? (p. 92-93)
2. What is the most daunting thing for Sofia about going to Saint Luke's? Why is she worried about this? What school memory resurfaces because of her worry? (p. 93-94)
3. Why doesn't Sofia want to ask others to help her buy the dresses she needs? How does this show that she's like Papa? (p. 95-96)
4. What is Berta's plan for getting the last two dresses that Sofia needs? Why does this worry Sofia? (p. 97-99)
5. How does Sofia help Berta while she's making the dresses? (p. 100)

Chapter 13: The Packing Shed | Pages 101-111

1. What is Sofia's plan for getting the \$400? (p. 103)
2. Why is it so hard for Sofia to find a job? (p. 105)
3. Where does Sofia find a job? Do you think this is easy work? (p. 106-107)
4. What surprises Sofia about the other people that work at the packing shed? (p. 108)
5. How many hours does Sofia work each day? (p. 108)
6. What happens during Sofia's last month at the packing shed? Why does this surprise her so much? (p. 110)
7. What does Sofia see in Mama for the first time? (p. 111)

Chapter 14: The Canicula | Pages 112-124

1. What is the canicula? How does Mama explain what it means? (p. 113)
2. How do Sofia and Berta make Lucy feel included? (p. 117-118)
3. How is the canicula different for the girls than it was for Mama when she was their age? (p. 120)
4. How do they celebrate Sofia's birthday that evening? (p. 120-124)
5. What does Sofia's family put her gifts in? What gifts do they give her? How is each of the gifts meaningful or special? (p. 122-123)
6. Sofia has wanted to go to Saint Luke's for so long, but now she begins to doubt? What causes her to doubt? (p. 124)
7. Papa gives Sofia one last gift. Does she open it? Make a prediction:

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- What do you think is in it? (p. 124)
8. Why can Sofia finally start packing? (p. 124)

Chapter 15: Another Mundo | Pages 125-135

1. What does Sofia pack to take with her to Saint Luke's? What does Mama give her? (p. 125-126)
2. What does Berta think the girls at Saint Luke's will think about the compadre props? (p. 126)
3. Why does Mama tell Sofia to order a big plate of enchiladas? (p. 127)
4. Why do you think that Sofia can't eat her breakfast? How would you feel if you were Sofia? (p. 128)
5. Both Mama and Berta wonder where certain things are like the panaderia or the drive-in. Do you think those things are anywhere near Saint Luke's? Why or why not? How is Saint Luke's going to be different from what Sofia is accustomed to? How might it compare to that Halloween when she wanted to go to 'the other side' of town? (p. 128)
6. What does Mama think of the first girl they meet in the dormitory? (p. 131)
7. Make an inference: Do you think Mama, Papa, Berta and Lucy like the dormitory at Saint Luke's? Do you think they want Sofia to stay there? Why or why not? (p. 131)
8. Why do you think it's so important to Mama that she set up Sofia's room altar? What does it mean or symbolize to Mama? (p. 132-133)
9. Sofia has met two different girls, Brooke and Terry. Compare the two girls. How are they alike? How are they different? Make a prediction: Do you think that Sofia will get along with her roommate Brooke? Why? (p. 130-133)
10. What is Mama going to do with the sock and lock of Sofia's hair? How is this typical of Mama? Think of the other kinds of things she's created. (p. 135)
11. How does Sofia feel when her family leaves? Imagine you were Sofia, how would you feel, left alone at a school far from home where you didn't know anyone? What does this say about Sofia's character? What kind of traits would one need to have in order to do something like this? (p. 135)
12. What do you think Sofia means when she says "I suddenly remembered Papa's words of many years before, that our side of town had it's own wealth and warmth. I finally understood what he'd meant" (p. 135). What did he mean? What is the wealth of the warmth of Sofia's side of town?

Chapter 16: Saints at Saint Luke's | Pages 136-146

1. What is Terry crying about? Make an inference: based on what you know of Terry so far, how would you describe her? How is she

- different from Sofia? How is her family different from Sofia's? Do you think these differences represent the wealth and warmth that Papa was referring to? (p. 136-137)
2. What do you think Sofia means when she says "And I had thought getting the dresses was going to be the hard part" (p. 137)? What has she realized is going to be harder?
 3. What is a parvenu? (p. 138)
 4. Why doesn't Sofia tell Mr. Smith about her summer? How does her summer compare to Charles' summer break? (p. 140-141)
 5. What does Marcos think of the dorms? Why do you think the chocolate makes him feel like he's back in McAllen? (p. 141)
 6. What happens in Sofia's first English class? (p. 142-143)
 7. How does Brooke's approach to field hockey demonstrate a larger difference between her and Sofia and their approaches to life and relationships? (p. 143-144)
 8. What starts happening to the different pieces of Sofia's room altar? Why might someone be doing this to her? Who do you think is doing it? (p. 144-145)
 9. How does Sofia find out who is behind taking the pieces of her altar? Why do you think Terry would do something like that? How does Sofia deal with it? Do you think that was the appropriate response? (p. 146)

Chapter 17: The Panty-Hose Baby | Pages 148-157

1. Why do you think the school works so hard to fill the students' days from sun-up to sun-down? What effect does this have on the students? Think about what Brooke said about her brother Tiff. (p. 148-149)
2. Why do you think Sofia needs to write the story about her family? What does it do for her? (p. 149-150)
3. What did Mama send in her first package? What other kinds of things does Mama send? (p. 150-154)
4. What does the doll for Clara look like? (p. 155)
5. What do Marcos and Clara realize about the school? What are the priorities for the students at Saint Luke's? How are these things different from the things that Sofia's has been taught to value? (p. 156)

Chapter 18: The Frozen Tamales | Pages 158-169

1. What does Marcos compare Saint Luke's to? Do you think this is true? (p. 159)
2. Think about Terry's comment about Mexicans and death and then compare it to the story Marcos told Skip from his dorm. How do the students at Saint Luke's appear to deal with and think about death? How does this demonstrate a difference between the culture Sofia and Marcos grew up in and the culture of the majority of students at Saint Luke's? Do you think one is healthier than the other? Why? (p. 160-161)

3. Why won't Mama let Sofia eat the tamales from the freezer? What is she saving them for? How does this demonstrate the different approaches in dealing with death between Sofia's family and the Saint Luke's community? (p. 162-163)
4. What does Sofia learn about Berta's plans for the future? How do they compare to Sofia's? (164)
5. What do the girls do with the tequila worm? (p. 165-166)
6. Did covering everything in plastic really save Tia Petra's things? What could be the lesson from this story? (p. 168)
7. What does Sofia's family eat for Thanksgiving? What does your family eat for Thanksgiving? Is the same or different? (p. 169)
8. What is Sofia's role in the family's Christmas *nacamiento* going to be? What does this mean? (p. 169)

Chapter 19: The Christmas Nacamiento | Pages 170-181

1. What is the Christmas celebration like at Saint Luke's? (p. 170-171)
2. What do Brooke and Sofia exchange for Christmas? How does each girl explain their gift to the other? (p. 171)
3. Do you think Sofia trusts Brooke as a friend? Why or why not? (p. 171-172)
4. What do Mama and Abuelita think about the ways the town and neighborhoods have changed? How do they think it should be? What does this show that they value? (p. 174-175)
5. The *nacamiento* represents the Christmas story, but it also represents something else. What do you think that is? Think about the memories that Abuelita talks about, and the things that Sofia remembers as she unwraps the different pieces. (p. 175-178)
6. What do you think Sofia learns from the experience of being the Christmas *madrina*? (p. 178-181)
7. How does Papa want Sofia to conjure him once he's gone? (p. 181)

Chapter 20: The Tequila Worm | Pages 182-193

1. What things change by the summer after Sofia's junior year? (p. 182-183)
2. What does Lucy reveal to Sofia about Papa? Why didn't Papa want Sofia to know?
3. How can Sofia tell that Papa is sick? (p. 184)
4. Why doesn't Papa want Sofia to transfer high schools? (p. 184)
5. Why is Papa hanging on? What does Tia Belia tell Sofia she needs to do? Do you think that was an easy thing for Sofia to do? (p. 185)
6. What was in the secret *cascarone*? Why do you think Papa left this for Sofia? (p. 190)
7. How does Papa's death change Sofia's focus in life? (p. 190)
8. How do Brooke and Marcos comfort Sofia after she's lost her

father? (p. 191-193)

Chapter 21: The Plaza | Pages 194-

1. How has Sofia's *barrio* changed over time? (p. 194-195)
2. How does Sofia attempt to combat the negative changes in the *barrio*?
3. What changes with the creation of the *placita*?

Reflective Writing Questions

Overall

1. How does Sofia change throughout the story? Think about what she was like as a little girl, the things she learned growing up, the realizations she had while at going to Saint Luke's. Use these things to support your answer.
2. Throughout the book Canales stresses the importance of family. Describe Berta's role in the family. Is she 'technically' a member of Sofia's family? Do they treat her like a family? How does Sofia refer to Berta? Think about what family means to you. Does family always have to be the people we're related to by birth or marriage? Who do you think of as your family?
3. Cultural traditions and celebrations play an important role in Sofia's life. Describe this role. Why were they so important or significant? What did Sofia learn from these?
4. Sofia's family and traditions are incredibly influential in making her the person she is. How has your family influenced you? What traditions does your family keep? What do traditions mean to you? Have you learned anything from them?
5. Sofia is close to everyone in her family and she learns something from all of them. Choose the relationship that resonates the most with you (for example Sofia's relationship with her mother, with Berta, with her father, with Lucy). Describe the relationship and what Sofia learned from that person. Then explain why you choose that relationship to write about.
6. Think about Terry's comment that Mexicans are obsessed with death. Do you think that's true? What role does death play in the novel? It's a frequent topic, but does that necessarily mean it's an obsession. What does Sofia learn through her various experiences that deal with death in some way?

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. This guide was prepared by Katrina Dillon, LAII Project Assistant and Lorraine Archibald, LAII Graduate 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>.