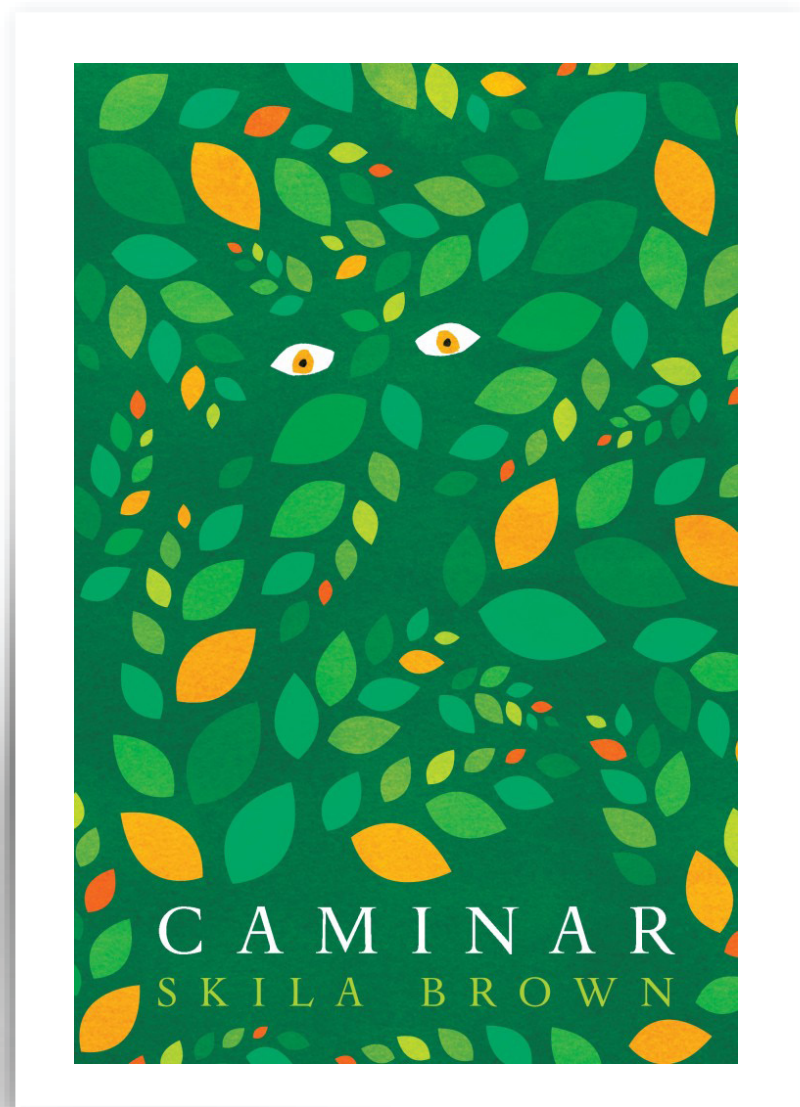


VAMOS A LEER

teaching latin america through literacy



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Educator's Guide

Caminar

Written by Skila Brown

Published by Candlewick, 2014

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Age Level: 10 and up



BOOK SUMMARY

Carlos knows that when the soldiers arrive with warnings about the Communist rebels, it is time to be a man and defend the village, keep everyone safe. But Mama tells him not yet — he's still her quiet moonfaced boy. The soldiers laugh at the villagers, and before they move on, a neighbor is found dangling from a tree, a sign on his neck: *Communist*. Mama tells Carlos to run and hide, then try to find her. . . . Numb and alone, he must join a band of guerillas as they trek to the top of the mountain where Carlos's *abuela* lives. Will he be in time, and brave enough, to warn them about the soldiers? What will he do then? A novel in verse inspired by actual events during Guatemala's civil war, *Caminar* is the moving story of a boy who loses nearly everything before discovering who he really is.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:

- A Junior Library Guild selection
- ALSC Notables Nominee
- YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults Nominee

AUTHOR'S CORNER

About Skila Brown:

Skila Brown is the author of *Caminar*. Her first completed novel, Brown worked on *Caminar* while she completed her MFA at the Vermont College of Fine Arts. The book is about the tragic experience of a young boy from Guatemala whose community is massacred. In an [interview with S.L. Duncan](#), Brown said, "I was inspired to write this book after many trips to Guatemala and much reading about its history, specifically the conflict that occurred there just a few decades ago. What happened there was tragic, and I was upset that it was something I'd known nothing about...I wanted to make sure more people knew about what happened."

The book is written in free verse poetry form, and as an added element Brown plays around with the form, shape and word placement of the poems to invoke deeper meaning. The simplified writing helps make this tragic story accessible to young readers.

She describes the process in an [interview with Smack Dab in the Middle](#): "This story lived in my head for a long time and was trying desperately to come out, but I wasn't listening. I was also unsure how to tell it really. And then I started writing down some poems and realizing maybe verse was the way to go. Telling the story through poems felt like it allowed a place for things unspoken, that it gave the reader some space to absorb and make sense of the violence in the story."



After writing the novel, Brown spent time in Guatemala, where she continued to revise it. One of the most challenging aspects was making a decision about language and whether to include an indigenous language. So as to not confuse the English-speaking reader, she settled for using Spanish. *Caminar* thus features terms in Spanish, as Brown has brilliantly and carefully dispersed them throughout the poems. She also includes a glossary at the end of the book.

Brown now resides with her husband and three sons in Indiana. She has two upcoming publications: *With The End In Sight*, another novel in verse, about Mary Ann Graves, one of the survivors of the ill-fated Donner party, and her family's wagon train journey from Illinois to the Sierra Nevada Mountains in 1846 (Fall 2015); and *Slickety Quick*, a picture book blend of poetry and non-fiction, all about sharks (Spring 2016).

Check out [Skila Brown's website](#) for more information about the author.

USING CAMINAR IN THE CLASSROOM

Like [Journey of Dreams](#) by Marge Pellegrino, *Caminar* offers a fictionalized account of the violent Guatemalan Civil War that lasted over thirty years. Both books tell their story through the eyes of a young protagonist, but Brown's *Caminar* is a novel in verse. The style of this genre makes *Caminar* a perfect introduction to a subject that's often not covered in young adult fiction or non-fiction. While the topic itself is certainly complex, the novel in verse format lends itself to struggling readers and ELLs. Each page is its own poem, so there aren't long chapters

to wade through or difficult dialogues that can be frustrating for readers to try and follow. With shorter text, teachers can spend more time focusing on meaning, symbolism and imagery in each poem. Because it is poetry, it would make for a great read aloud, teacher or student led, providing great oral language practice. I think novels in verse are a great opportunity for focused poetry study as well. As a novel, they're longer than the typical poems we teach in the k-12 classroom. While many students can be intimidated by poetry, the novel in verse gives them time to settle in both to reading poetry and exploring the particular author's style. Brown's work offers so many examples of the creative things a writer can do with poetry just through arrangement, spacing and shape of the poems that it really lends itself to a poetry unit.

Caminar is also a great way for students to see the ways in which fiction can become a means to push back against injustice and repression through re-writing or re-telling historical accounts of events. These re-tellings can include the multiple voices of those affected and the aspects of the events that are often written out of or ignored in more sanitized and sugar-coated versions. Some have critiqued the novel for not giving enough background information about the Guatemalan Civil War, but when told through the eyes of Carlos, this is the reality of the way that he and the other villagers would have experienced the war. They didn't have all of the information; there were conflicting accounts of what was happening and why; people were confused; and many didn't know what to believe. To provide all of the background information through the poetry would present an unrealistic version of Carlos' experience. However, students will get more out of the story if additional information on the Guatemalan Civil War is provided as contextual material. This would be a great opportunity to pair fiction and non-fiction together in a literacy and/or social studies unit.

While the topic may be one that students are unfamiliar with, I don't think it will be difficult for them to engage with the story of Carlos, the main protagonist. Carlos is a young adult and, like many of them, he is struggling to decide who he wants to be as he realizes that he is growing up. While his coming-of-age experience is much different than many of our students who don't have to grow up in the midst of a violent conflict, this may be the reality of some of our students. As an advocate for the [We Need Diverse Books](#) movement, I strongly believe that all students need to read about books that reflect their own lives and experiences. I'm also a strong proponent of books that challenge our worldviews, allow us to question our own beliefs, and potentially encourage us to see the world through a different lens. *Caminar* can be quite powerful in that regard given the ways in which it engages with notions of gender. Throughout the story there are a number of references to traditional masculinity. This would be a great opportunity to allow students to really think about societal notions of masculinity and what message these ideas are sending. In the book, various characters say things such as (and I'm paraphrasing), to be a man means to be ready to fight, to no longer listen to one's mother or elders, and to never be afraid. While Carlos struggles with how to define what it means to be a man for himself, I believe he

comes to different conclusions than his peers by the end of the story. His struggle provides the perfect opportunity for students to discuss, analyze, and struggle with these things themselves.

While a difficult subject, *Caminar* is an excellent read. It's another book that should definitely be on our library and classrooms shelves.

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

- [The Horn Book Review of *Caminar*](#)
- [Rich In Color Review of *Caminar*](#)

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

- [The Loud Mouth Librarian Interview with Skila Brown](#)
- [Latinos in Kid Lit Interview with Skila Brown](#)
- [Smack Dab in the Middle Interview with Skila Brown](#)

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 other curricula:

- [Skila Brown Educators Guide to *Caminar*](#)

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 and History

The Maya:

Carlos and his family are Mayan, and this an important part of understanding the story. Many students may not be knowledgeable about who the Maya are, their history, or their cultural traditions. Using appropriate print or online resources have students research the Maya, creating a poster presentation, essay, or some other form for

communicating what they've learned. This could be done in small groups or individually. Brown University put together the following unit: [Culture Connect: Experience the Culture of the World](#), which would also be useful. One section of this unit is dedicated to the Maya of Guatemala, focusing on their tradition of weaving. This provides a more structured lesson plan for the entire class to participate in as a whole group.

Other lesson plans and resources on the Maya can be found at:

- http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/art/maya_6-07.html
- http://pa.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_2_17313_2059_285531_43/http%3B/pubcontent.state.pa.us/publishedcontent/publish/cop_environment/phmc/communities/extranet/archaeology/curriculumcontent/supplemental_maya1.pdf

Rigoberta Menchú and Human Rights Activism in Guatemala:

In *Caminar* Brown references the violence and human rights abuses many Guatemalans suffered during the Guatemalan Civil War. Depending upon the grade level of students reading the book, it may be appropriate to delve deeper into the details of this period of Guatemalan history. Rigoberta Menchú, an indigenous woman from Guatemala, is well known for her efforts to expose the human rights violations suffered by many indigenous peoples in Latin America. In 1992 she won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work. There are a number of resources available to help teach about her efforts:

- Teaching Tolerance: <http://www.tolerance.org/activity/rigoberta-mench>
- Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights: <http://curriculum.rfkcenter.org/curriculums/30?locale=en>
- The My Hero Project: http://www.myhero.com/go/hero.asp?hero=r_menchu

Guided Reading Questions

1. Describe the geography of the location of Carlos' village. (p. 3). Draw a picture of what you think the area looks like based on the description in the first poem.
2. What imagery used in the second, third, and fourth poems alludes to Carlos still being a young boy? What things is Carlos still too young to do? (p. 3-7)
3. Re-read the poem "Almost Dark" (p. 7). Compare how Mateo and Roberto respond to Carlos leaving the game. Make an inference: what does this say about the kind of person Mateo is? Roberto?
4. While being "old enough" comes with good things, there is also a threat involved in being "old enough." What is this threat? What happened to David when he was old enough? What do you think happened to Manuel? Think about what Manuel did when the officers came to get David. (p. 8)
5. What do you think it means that the soldiers brought more bullets

- than corn? Why would they need more ammunition than food? (p. 9)
6. The villagers have different beliefs about why the soldiers are there. What do they think? Who seems to have the most compassionate response to the soldiers? Who is the most critical of their presence? Explain (p. 9)
 7. What information do the soldiers want? What do they offer in exchange for this information? What could the villagers do with what the soldiers offer to pay? How could this be misused? What could happen if someone was desperate for money? Do the boys even know what a Communist is? (p. 10)
 8. What do the soldiers leave the day before they pack up camp? What lesson do you think the soldiers are trying to teach the villagers? (p. 11)
 9. Do you think that Juan Choc Túc was a Communist? Why do you think he was hung? (p. 12)
 10. How do the soldiers describe the Communists? What do they say are the dangers of Communists? (p. 13-14)
 11. The soldiers say that the Communists will take away the villagers' land. Do most of the villagers own land? Should the Communists be a threat to them then? What do you think Santiago means when he says "Land does not belong to anyone"? Do you think this is true? Explain. (p. 15)
 12. There seems to be confusion over who the villagers should fight to keep the village safe and who is a danger. What are the different opinions? Think about Roberto's mother and what happened to both her son and husband. Why do you think she believes they should fight the army? (p. 16)
 13. According to Mateo, what does it mean to be a man? (p. 16)
 14. What is Flora's home like? (p. 18)
 15. What does Flora learn from her grandmother? Why is this important for the whole village? (p. 19)
 16. Why do the coffee beans represent hope? (p. 20-21)
 17. What does Carlos think it means to be a man? Does Mama agree or disagree? Why does he feel good about his work in the coffee fields? (p. 21)
 18. How did Santiago become a man? How has the village changed in Santiago's lifetime? (p. 22-23)
 19. What do the rebels do when they come through the village? Re-read the warnings from the soldiers on pages 13-14. How do the rebels' actions compare with what the soldiers said? (p. 24-27)
 20. Do the rebels return to the village? (p. 29)
 21. How does Brown visually represent the scene when the rebels return with her arrangement of her poem? (p. 31)
 22. Compare Mama's response to the rebels with that of the rest of the village. (p. 32-33)
 23. What does the rebel soldier notice about Mama? (p. 34)
 24. How do the villagers respond once the rebels are gone? What do they say about the rebels? Is there consensus? Compare the rebels time in the village with that of the soldiers. Who actually killed a

- man while they were there? (p. 33-35)
25. What lingering effects does the rebels' visit have on the villagers? (p. 37)
 26. What warning does Angel give to the villagers? What has he realized is the danger of both the rebels and the army? What will happen to the village regardless of who returns? (p. 38)
 27. What does being a man mean to Mateo? Do you agree with him? Do you think that Mateo realizes the complexity of the situation with the rebels and the army? (p. 38)
 28. What does Mama tell Carlos he should do if there is any trouble? Do you think she understands the complexity of the situation? Who do you think is making the better choice—Mama or Mateo? (p. 40-41)
 29. How does Carlos describe his feelings about going into the jungle? Does this mean he's nervous? Explain Brown's simile. (p. 42)
 30. What sounds get louder as Carlos gets closer to the mountain? What is the last sound that Carlos hears from the village? What do you think this is foreshadowing? Look at how Brown writes "all disappeared" as the last line separate from the rest of the poem. Do you think this is a warning? Why? Of what? (p. 45)
 31. When does Carlos realize that something is wrong? What does he hear? (p. 47)
 32. What happens in the village while Carlos is in the jungle (p. 48)
 33. How does Carlos disappear when he hears the violence in the village? (p. 49)
 34. What does the wheeze mean? Who has Carlos heard wheeze before? Who attacked the village? (p. 51)
 35. How does the owl comfort Carlos so that he can sleep? (p. 53-55)
 36. What does Carlos dream about? Think about what has just happened in his village. Why do you think the lake is red? Do you think the villagers are really laying down to sleep? What could this be symbolic of? Why do you think Carlos is dreaming about this? How is his dream helping him to process what happened? What message does the dream leave Carlos with? (p. 56-58)
 37. What do you think the butterflies symbolize? Why is the last one yellow? Explain. (p. 60)
 38. How does the wind keep Carlos safe in both the dream and then the next day when he must leave the tree? (p. 61)
 39. What does Carlos think about as he continues walking through the jungle? What is he struggling to accept? (p. 63-64)
 40. Where can Carlos find water? (p. 68-69)
 41. Why does Mama choose to stay in Chópan? (p. 70)
 42. Why did Carlos go to Patrival before? (p. 71)
 43. What message does the wind carry to Carlos? What does "the death of a year's worth of planting" mean? Think about what the wind could carry? What have the soldiers done to the fields that Santiago worked so hard to guard? (p. 73)
 44. What does Carlos now realize that the helicopters mean? (p. 74)
 45. What do you think Carlos' dream means? What is he still afraid of? (p. 77-78)

46. How does Carlos know that the people he hears are not from his village? (p. 81)
47. Why does Carlos say “stupid soldiers”? What should they know? (p. 84)
48. What is significant about their movement up? Where does this mean they’re heading? (p. 84-86)
49. When Carlos realizes they are heading for his abuela’s village, what does he do? How does this show he’s already changed from the beginning of the story? (p. 87-88)
50. How does Brown juxtapose Carlos and the other young boy in the poem “Eye to Eye”? How are the two boys similar? (p. 90)
51. How does this group compare to the group of rebels that visited Chópan? How many are in this group? How many were in the group that visited Chópan? What is the leader wearing in this group? The group that visited Chópan? (p. 91-92)
52. Why does Carlos laugh when the boy admits that he thought Carlos was a wild animal from the woods? (p. 94)
53. What is the group’s experience with the army? (p. 94-95).
54. Think about all you’ve read about the army? Do you think they were honest with the villagers of Chópan? Are the rebels the most dangerous threat to villagers like those in Chópan? Explain your answer.
55. Why do you think Carlos stumbles when Paco says “Fighting for my people”?
56. Why do you think Carlos responds, “They live in Patrival” when Paco asks about his family? (p. 96)
57. What differences does Carlos identify between himself and Paco? (p. 97)
58. What statement about masculinity does Paco make? How is this similar to things Mateo said? (p. 97)
59. Why does Carlos respond the way he does to the tortillas? What does he realize about the tortillas? (p. 100-101)
60. How does Paco describe what happened in Chópan? How does Miguel’s description echo Carlos’ dream? How does Carlos finally learn what happened to his mother? (p. 101-104)
61. How does Carlos physical location on the mountain echo his mental state? (Hint: think about the haze, the inability to see, the need to wait) (p. 105)
62. Why do you think the men in Chópan decided that everyone in the village needed to sleep a night in the forest? What did Carlos learn doing that? How has it kept him safe so far? (p. 109)
63. How many people disappeared from Paco’s village? How does this compare to the number of people that were killed in Chópan? (p. 114)
64. Why do you think Carlos says “Xuba, the volcano--/used to be the think/ our village feared the most”? Why do you think he phrases this in the past tense? (p. 117)
65. Why is Carlos struggling with feelings of guilt? What does he think he should have done? (p. 120)
66. Why does Miguel offer to keep Carlos’ sweater until night fall? Is it

- really because it's too nice? (p. 123)
67. Miguel explains to Carlos why they are fighting. What are their reasons? Do they sound like the same things that the soldiers accused the Communists of during their first visit to Chópan? (p. 126)
 68. Carlos is trying to process the information he knows about the army, but some of it is contradictory? What is confusing Carlos? (p. 126)
 69. How is Brown's description of Roberto's father playing the marimba similar to what happened when he was taken by the army? (p. 128-129)
 70. Why do you think Miguel spoke to Hector in Spanish? Do you think he wanted to be sure that Carlos understood? What message might he have been trying to share with Carlos? (p. 131)
 71. Re-read Santiago's words: "A man who throws/ a thousand stones/ into the lake is not/ trying to hit/ a fish, just/ make all the fish/ afraid enough to/ swim away" (p. 133). How does this answer Carlos' question about why they army helicopters rain down bullets into a forest where they can't see anything?
 72. What does a *nahual* do? (p. 138)
 73. What things does Carlos think about as he remembers his village? (p. 140-141)
 74. Why do you think the owl wakes Carlos up? What does Carlos realize once he's awake? (p. 143-146)
 75. What does Carlos do once he realizes that he's hearing helicopters? (p. 146)
 76. Where does Carlos direct all the villagers from Patrival to hide from the army? (p. 147-148)
 77. How does Brown convey the simultaneous sound of the helicopters while Carlos is trying to help all the villagers get up in the tree? (p. 151)
 78. What do the helicopters do when they arrive at Patrival? (p. 152-155)
 79. Why do you think the army is attacking these villages? Have the villagers done anything to threaten the government?
 80. Where does Carlos find Hector, Ana, and Miguel? (p. 161-163)
 81. Who is missing? (p. 164-166)
 82. What is abuela's reaction to the rebels? Does she think they are any different than the army? (p. 167)
 83. Why do the villagers decide to help the rebels? (p. 169)
 84. How does the owl help Carlos again? (p. 172)
 85. How does Carlos respond when Paco says he acted like a child? (p. 176-177)
 86. What does Carlos have to admit when abuela asks him why he is in Patrival? Does anyone make him feel guilty or ashamed about how he survived? How do Miguel and Paco respond to what Carlos says? (p. 180)
 87. Why does Miguel say that the village will be safer once they are on their way? What does he mean? (p. 181)
 88. Whose voices does Carlos think about as he decides whether to stay

**Reflective
Writing
Questions**

- in the village or go with the rebels? What do you think Carlos should do? What would you do? (p. 182-183)
89. What does Carlos realize he can do if he stays in the village? Many times in the story, different men said that to be a man meant one had to fight in order to protect one's village and family. Do you think this is true? Are there other ways to protect one's village and family than by fighting? (p. 184)
 90. Why do you think Carlos gives Paco his marbles? (p. 185)
 91. How does Carlos explain *nahuales* to the younger children? Do you think Carlos has a *nahual*? What do you think it is? (p. 186-187)
 92. What happens in Chópan in 2014? (p. 191)
 93. Was Carlos the only one to survive? Who else survived the massacre? (p. 192-193)
 94. Who does Carlos name his daughter after? (p. 191-192)

Taken from [Skila Brown's Educator's Guide](#) for her novel, the following are excellent questions for extended writing responses.

1. Carlos changes in this book. How does he change? What changes about him?
2. Imagine you're talking to Carlos. What would you tell him he should do at the end of the book? Why?
3. Some novels lend themselves to be told in poems while others feel right in prose. What do you think makes a story better suited for one than the other?
4. What kind of *nahual* would you like to have? Why?
5. "Not Yet" (p. 5)—Carlos is caught between being old enough and too young. Write a similar poem about your own life—what you're old enough to do but too young to do.
6. Santiago Luc is a story teller in his village. Do you know someone in your life who has stories to tell? Interview the person and write down one of the stories you're told.
7. "After They Left" (p. 35)—This is a caught words poem. Like a found words poem, these are snippets of what Carlos hears people saying around him. Take your notebook to a crowded place and write down the snippets of words you hear people saying around you. Can you arrange them into a poem? Don't forget that placement on the page, white space, and line breaks are all poetic tools.
8. Write a narrative letter from Carlos to you, explaining what has happened to his village.
9. Write a newspaper article about what happened in Chópan. You will need background and research about the Guatemalan conflict.

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