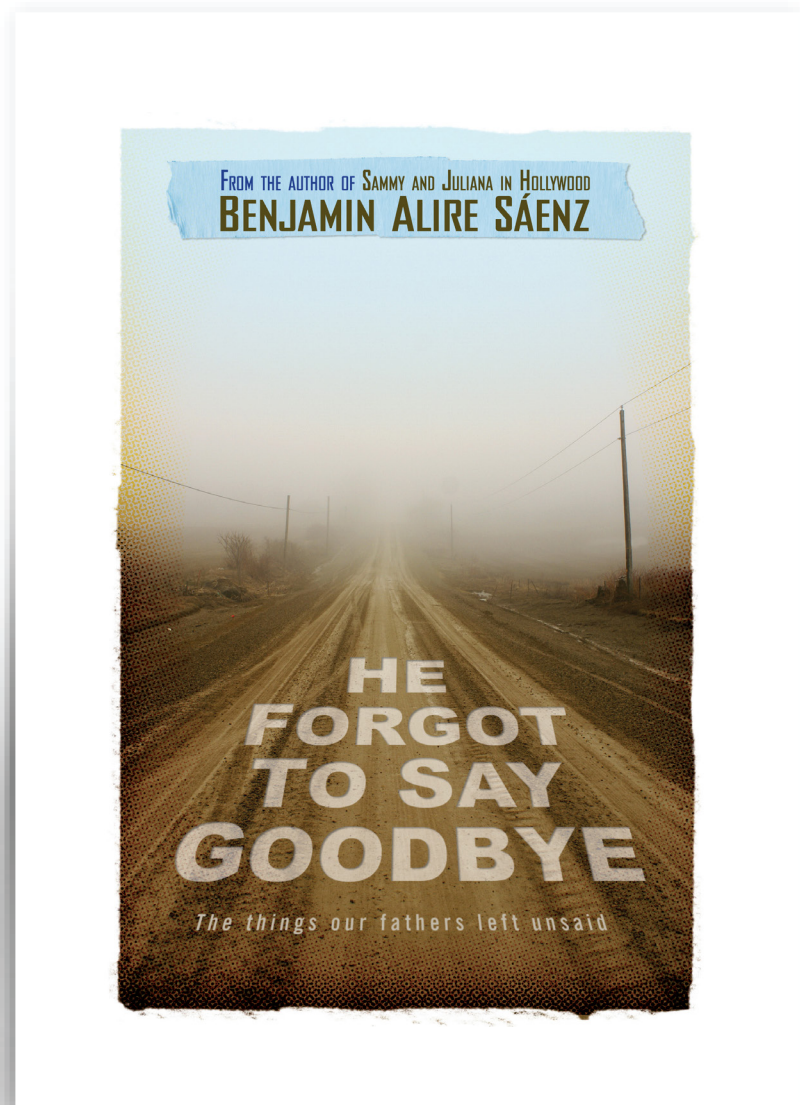


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Educator's Guide

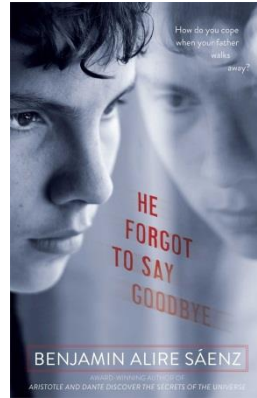
He Forgot to Say Goodbye

Written by Benjamin Alire Sáenz

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Age Level: 12 and up



BOOK SUMMARY

Ramiro Lopez and Jake Upthegrove don't appear to have much in common. Ram lives in the Mexican-American working-class barrio of El Paso called "Dizzy Land." His brother is sinking into a world of drugs, wreaking havoc in their household. Jake is a rich West Side white boy who has developed a problem managing his anger. An only child, he is a misfit in his mother's shallow and materialistic world. But Ram and Jake do have one thing in common: They are lost boys who have never met their fathers. This sad fact has left both of them undeniably scarred and obsessed with the men who abandoned them. As Jake and Ram overcome their suspicions of each other, they begin to move away from their loner existences and realize that they are capable of reaching out beyond their wounds and the neighborhoods that they grew up in. Their friendship becomes a healing in a world of hurt.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:

- Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award
- Américas Award Commended Title
- BRLA Southwest Book Award
- NYPL Best Books for Teens

AUTHOR'S CORNER

About Benjamin Alire Sáenz:

Novelist, poet, young adult novelist, and children's book author Benjamin Alire Sáenz was born in 1954 in a farming village outside of Las Cruces, New Mexico, close to the U.S. -Mexico border. Author of this month's *Vamos a Leer* featured novel, *He Forgot to Say Goodbye*, Sáenz was brought up in a traditional Mexican-American family.



As a child Sáenz grew up speaking only Spanish until he entered elementary school. As a way of obtaining educational opportunities, he became a Catholic priest, a calling that lasted only three years. His future belonged to writing. His education eventually took him to the St. Thomas Seminary in Denver, Colorado; the University of Louvain in Louvain, Belgium; the University of Texas at El Paso; the University of Iowa; and Stanford University. He has studied philosophy, art history, theology, creative writing, and literary studies with a focus on twentieth century American poetry.

In 1993, he resettled in the border region between Texas and New Mexico to teach in the bilingual MFA program at The University of Texas at El Paso. Themes and issues involving this region, immigration, and the Mexican-American experience remain central to his writing. Sáenz's writing career blossomed earlier with his award-winning poetry collections, but has received wide commendation most recently for his novels, and short stories.

His first young adult novel, *Sammy & Juliana in Hollywood*, won the 2004 Américas Book Award. *He Forgot to Say Goodbye*, his second young adult novel, won the Tomás Rivera Mexican-American Children's Book Award in 2009. His most recent and celebrated work, YA novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, tackles issues of identity and homosexuality. Sáenz has also published four bilingual children's books.

USING *He Forgot to Say Goodbye* IN THE CLASSROOM

I've yet to read a Sáenz novel that doesn't elicit strong emotions. I found myself laughing out loud at some parts and crying at others. On the surface it may sound very similar to Sáenz's most recent YA novel, *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, but the two novels actually share few similarities (other than the wonderful writing). It's a contemporary coming-of-age novel about two very different young men who have one pivotal thing in common: fathers who left and never seemed to look back. Despite the opposite circumstances of their lives, this one thing is enough to help them eventually forge a friendship unlike any either of them has had before.

The almost confessional style of writing with alternating points of view can take some getting used to. Also, as our book group found, it takes some time to become accustomed to being in the heads of two teenage boys. Let's be honest, there's a reason most of us wouldn't choose to

relive that period in our lives. If you find you're not immediately engaged, this is one book where I would say stick it out and keep going. It's well worth it. On the other hand, these same things may make it more accessible and engaging to a young adult reader. Like most of Sáenz's novels, his main protagonists are young men. Yet, because he creates strong female friends for his male characters, his stories can engage all students.

There's no sugarcoated reality in Sáenz's writing. I think that's part of what I appreciate so much about his work. He doesn't run away from the hard stuff. Instead, he dives right in, taking you on a journey that will most certainly be painful to read, but I'll also bet will change the way you look at the world. Life isn't easy. In *He Forgot to Say Goodbye*, Sáenz takes on the pain of absent parents, death, racism, drug abuse, and inequality in education. The majority of us have suffered some kind of trauma and we have the scars to show for it. If we're going to prepare our students to be successful in life, we have to talk about these kinds of things. We have to admit that as educators, adults, and/or parents we've struggled, and we've been changed by these experiences. We have to model for our young adults how to deal with the emotions that the struggles or trauma bring up.

I love Saenz's books because they bring to the surface all these emotions that we so rarely address in school. He has a way of describing both the internal and tangible physical manifestations of emotions in a way that few other YA authors do. In doing this, he not only gives voice to the experiences of so many teenagers, but also brings awareness to the idea of emotional well being, or the lack of it, something often entirely neglected in our curricula. As I know I've said before, books like this are so essential because they create the space to have these kinds of necessary conversations.

If for no other reason, this book should be in our classrooms and libraries because it's excellent writing. If we learn to write through what we read, Sáenz is a phenomenal writing teacher. He has a way with words that is unlike most writers, maybe because he's a poet as well as a novelist. I'm not sure I've read a better example of the way in which the voice of a character as portrayed through the writing creates such a clear picture of personality as is done here for Ramiro and Jake.

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

- [Crazy QuiltEdi](#)
- [The Bookette](#)
- [Publishers Weekly](#)

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

- [Lannan Foundation Podcast-Reading and Conversation with Benjamin Sáenz](#)
- [PBS News Hour Podcast-Interview with Benjamin Sáenz discussing U.S./Mexico Border](#)
- [NPR article and interview with Sáenz on “Discovering Sexuality Through Teen Lit”](#)

LESSON PLANS & ACTIVITIES

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

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

Guided Reading Questions

- 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.

Part One | Pages 1-100

1. At the very beginning of the book both Ramiro's and Jake share their thoughts on what they think it means to be a father. Re-read this page. What can we infer about their fathers from each of their statements? What do you think it means to be a father?
2. How does Ramiro imagine his father? How does he characterize him? (p. 3-5)
3. Why do you think Ramiro spends so much time thinking about and imagining his father? (p. 3-7)
4. Re-read the following quote from Jake: "All I'm trying to do is talk to you. Are you listening? See, the thing is, *I don't think you are listening*. Okay, see, we have a problem. You don't think I want to talk and I don't think you want to listen" (p. 8). Have you ever felt this way? When? What was the situation?
5. Jake's tone of voice is much different from Ramiro's. How would you describe his tone? What feelings or emotions does it communicate? (p. 9-10)
6. What did Jake learn from his first fight? (p. 11)
7. What problematic stereotypes does Jake's mom reveal when she says "What's wrong with you? Don't you know you could wind up in jail? And you don't even know Spanish" (p. 12)?
8. What critique of adults does Jake have? What do you think of his argument? Do you think it's valid? (p. 13)
9. How would you characterize Jake's principal based on the exchange described on pages 14-16. Use examples from the text to support your answer.
10. Jake makes the statement that he "came to school to be taught, not to be managed" (p. 15). In your own experience do you think school is more about managing or teaching? Explain your answer.
11. Define the word "irony." Why do you think this is Jake's favorite word? (p. 16)
12. What is ironic about Jake's issues with his last name? (p. 16)
13. How does Ramiro describe his mother? (p. 18-21)

14. How does Ramiro describe his Tía Lisa? (p. 18-22)
15. What does Mrs. Herrera think of the students at her school? Have you ever known a teacher like that? How does that sort of an attitude affect students? (p. 22)
16. How are Ramiro and his brother Tito alike? How are they different? (p. 23-24)
17. What lesson does Ramiro's mom teach him about loan companies and banks? Do you think this was an important thing to learn? (*p. 24-25)
18. What does it mean when Jake says "You destroy me"? (p. 28-29)
19. How does Jake's conversation with his father go? How did he feel afterwards? What do you think he was looking for or hoping for when he decided to call his father? (p. 28-31)
20. Why does Ramiro keep a journal? (p. 33)
21. Share your opinion: Do you think there's any truth in Tito's statement: "Most people think you're wrong 'cause you're nothing but a poor Mexican. And if you're poor, that just means you're stupid" (p. 35)
22. Why do you think Tito is "hard as a rock" (p.37)? Do you think he really doesn't love his mom and Ramiro? (p. 35-37)
23. What happens when Jake tries to have a conversation with his mother? (p. 40-42)
24. How are Jake's worldviews different from his Mom's and David's? (p. 42)
25. Why does Jake bring up religion with his mom? (p. 45)
26. Is the magnet school really a part of Jefferson? Why is this? (p. 47)
27. Why is Jake so critical of David? (p. 48-49)
28. At this point in the book, how would you describe Jake's relationship with his mother? What do you think is the main source of conflict between them? (p. 1-50)
29. Ramiro thinks that Alejandra wants everything. What does Ramiro want? Do you think this is something that's easy to achieve? Make a prediction: Do you think that Ramiro will get what he wants by the end of the book? (p. 51)
30. Describe the kind of teacher Mr. Cardoza is. How do you think this impacts his students? (p. 52)
31. How does Ramiro explain the relationship between La Jeff and the pre-med magnet school? What message does this send to the students at each school? (p. 52-53)
32. Ramiro says that neither he nor Jake fits in at school. Think about your own school, do you think either of them would fit in? Why or why not? (p. 53)
33. What does Monica mean when she says that they're all anonymous? (p. 55)
34. Have you heard people say something like "You're thinking like a Mexican" or "You're thinking like a gringa?" What do you think people are insinuating when they say these kinds of things? (p. 57)
35. Who is Alejandra? (p. p. 57-59)
36. What can we infer about Alejandra from her desire to change her name and move away from the neighborhood? (p. 59-60)

37. How would you characterize Ramiro and Alejandra's relationship from what you've read so far? How does Ramiro feel about Alejandra? (p. 57-61)
38. Why do you think Tito seems to hate Ramiro so much? (p. 63)
39. How would you characterize the two brothers' relationship? (p. 62-65)
40. Think about what Ramiro says to Tito: "It's a lot of work, to hate your brother" (p. 64). What does he mean by this? Do you think it's a true statement? Explain.
41. Why doesn't Ramiro think that Alejandra should go out with Steve? Do you think that's a good criterion to judge a person by? Explain. (p. 67-68)
42. What advice is Ramiro's mom trying to give him when she tells him about her high school experience? (p. 69)
43. Make a prediction: What do you think has happened to Tito? (p. 71-73)
44. Do you agree with Ramiro? Do you think there are a lot of sad houses? (p. 72-73)
45. Have you ever felt like Ramiro, that you don't have anything in common with anyone? How did or do you deal with that feeling? (p. 73)
46. What simile does Jake's teacher make about Jake's brain? Do you think this was a compliment or an insult? Explain. (p. 74)
47. Do you agree with Jake that no one understands each other? Explain. (p. 74)
48. Why is Rosie so upset? How does Jake attempt to help? (p. 75-76)
49. What is Jake's mom's response to Rosie's situation? How does Jake respond to his mother? (p. 76-77)
50. What does Jake decide to do when his mother won't help Rosie? (p. 78-79)
51. What is Jake's interaction with Mr. Armendariz like? (p. 83-84)
52. Explain Jake's statement, "That was the thing—the world was designed to destroy people" (p. 87)
53. Re-read Jake's exchange with Mrs. Anaya about the concept of embracing on page 88. Do you think Jake has a point when he questions Mrs. Anaya about the idea of embracing the pain that was inflicted on people at the Abu Ghraib prison? Why do you think Mrs. Anaya refuses to really respond to Jake's question? (p. 88)
54. Do you think Jake questioning the injustice that he sees is "looking for trouble" as Mrs. Anaya suggests? How do you think Mrs. Anaya should have responded when Jake shared Rosie's situation? (p. 91-92)
55. What is Jake's issue with people? Does he really hate them? (p. 96-97)
56. Why does Jake say yes to his mom about the party? (p. 98-99)

Part Two | Pages 101-208

1. How would you define a winner and a loser? (p. 101)

2. What do you think it's like to live life as Tito with all of his unhappiness? Have you ever known anyone like Tito? (p. 103-104)
3. Have you ever had a similar experience to Ramiro, where your intuition tells you something bad is going to happen, and you can actually feel it in your body? (p. 104) Was your intuition right?
4. What can you infer about Lalo's life when he starts crying after Ramiro's mom and aunt hug him? (p. 109)
5. Make a prediction: Do you think Lalo and Ramiro are going to find Tito? (p. 109-110)
6. What do Lalo and Ramiro find at Jeremy's house? What does it say about Lalo when he tries to keep Ramiro from looking through the window? (p. 112)
7. What do they learn about Tito's condition once they get to the hospital? (p. 116)
8. What insight does Tía Lisa have about being strong and weak? Do you think she's correct? Explain. (p. 116-117)
9. Have you ever been in a position like Ramiro where you had to be strong so that you could catch someone and make sure they didn't "fall off the world"? Have you ever been the person who needed to be caught? Share what happened. (p. 119)
10. Who does Ramiro run into at the cemetery? What do Ramiro and Jake have in common? How would you describe their interaction? Would you say that they immediately became friends? (p. 120-22)
11. What is Tía Lisa doing when Ramiro returns to the ER waiting room? (p. 125-126)
12. What does Ramiro say to Tito when he goes in to visit him? (p. 127-128)
13. Do you hear people laugh often the way that Ramiro describes it: not "the kind of laughing that's putting someone down. I mean the kind of laughing that means you've just discovered something really beautiful"? (p. 129)
14. What does Jake really want out of life? Why does this put him into conflict with his mother? (p. 130-131)
15. Have you ever felt like any of the descriptions Jake gives in his list? Which one? What made you feel that way? (p. 132-133)
16. Why does Jake want to get rid of all of his material possessions? (p. 134-139)
17. What does Jake see when he goes to McKelligon Canyon? How does this make him feel? What would you do if you were in Jake's position? (p. 141-142)
18. Why does Ramiro think that Alejandra was born too late? (p. 152-153)
19. How did Alejandra know Jeremy? What was he like then? (p. 157-158)
20. What did Tito overdose on? (p. 159)
21. Why do you think it feels like "a new world" to Ramiro? (p. 161)
22. Why are the words that Ramiro uses so important to his mom? (p. 164)
23. What did the test reveal about Tito's brain activity? What does this mean? (p. 170)

24. Why does Ramiro want his mom to go home for a while? (p. 171)
25. What do you think about the things Ramiro says about hope on page 172? Do you think hope is typically seen as a positive concept? Can it be negative? Explain.
26. Why doesn't Ramiro want to go to the party? What does Alejandra think of his reasoning? (p. 174-177)
27. What's Jake's new theory about parties? Do you think he's right? (p. 181)
28. Do you think Jake is correct: "Listen, the thing about women—they always blame the girl. It's the girl's fault. The guys are assholes, but it's still the girl's fault"? Explain your answer. (p. 185)
29. What advice does Julie give Jake when they talk at the coffee shop? (p. 191-194)
30. How does Jake respond when he finds out Sally invited his father to the party? (p. 198-200) How would you respond in this situation?
31. What does Jake realize about why he hasn't told Sally about David's affair? Who is he trying to protect? (p. 201)
32. Why does Jake want to be friends with Ramiro so badly? What is it about Ramiro that he is so impressed by? (p. 202-205)

Part Three | Pages 209-321

1. Why do you think Ramiro says that Alejandra is the only person who knows who she is? (p. 209). If someone asked you who you are, how would you respond? Explain.
2. If you were Ramiro, would you want to see your father after all this time? (p. 212-213)
3. Do you think it's a compliment when talking about Alejandra Ramiro says, "You can't turn your back on girls like Alejandra. They plant themselves everywhere and then they just start to grow" (p. 213)?
4. What do you think Alejandra means when she answers "Almost true" (p. 214)? Are there any experiences or things in your life where if someone asked you if you were really okay with it, you could answer "Almost true"?
5. How do Jake and Alejandra interact when they meet at the party? (p. 220-225)
6. What does Ram realize about Jake during their initial conversation at the party? (p. 223)
7. Do you think Alejandra is correct, that missing parents can become an addiction? Explain. What other types of things (besides those we typically talk about like drugs and alcohol) can become addictions? (p. 229)
8. What surprise interactions does Jake have with different friends when the party first starts? What does he learn from these various conversations? (p. 232-239)
9. How does Jake's party end? (p. 246-252)
10. What does Ram's father say when his mother talks to him? How does it affect Ram? What do you think it would feel like to have your father say what Ram's said? (p. 263-264)

**Reflective
Writing
Questions**

11. How does Sally act the morning after the party? Does this seem like a normal or healthy reaction to what happened? (p. 270-273)
12. How does Sally deal with the fact that she slapped Jake? Does she take responsibility for it? (p. 273-274)
13. Why do you think Jake feels dead as he watches the movie with his mom and David? (p. 285)
14. What test do Ram and Alejandra give Jake? How does he do? (p. 292-293)
15. What façade does Jake realize he has been hiding behind for so long? (p. 296) Have you ever put up a façade to hide your feelings? Did it work?
16. Alex, Jake, and Ram all say they hate their absent parents (p. 302), but in later conversations realize they really don't. What do they realize about how they feel about them? Do you think this is a healthier way for them to move on? (p. 304, 306-307)
17. How does Jake spend his birthday? (p. 314-320)
18. Think about what Ram, Alex, and Jake were like at the beginning of the book. How have they changed by the end?

1. Compare the different tone of voice that Sáenz uses for Ramiro and Jake. How does Sáenz use this to reflect the personalities of the two boys? Use examples from the text to support your answer.
2. Compare and contrast the different relationships the two boys have with their mothers. Are there any similarities? What are the differences? How do the relationships they have with their mothers impact the two boys?
3. Compare and contrast Ramiro's and Jake's experiences in school and with their teachers. Despite the very different contexts and circumstances are there similarities in their experiences? What are they?
4. Pick one of the short statements that open the different sections (example: pages 1, 8, 17, 26, 32, 38, 51, 101, 130, 149, 181, 209, 231, 253) that resonates the most with you. Explain what it means, its significance for the story, and why you connect with it.
5. Ramiro says that all he wants is for his mother, his brother and himself to be happy. What do you think happiness means? Do you think that we are always in control of our own happiness? Would you say that you're happy? Why or why not?
6. The two main protagonists are male, but they have significant friends who are female. What role do their female friends play in their lives? How would you describe these women?
7. Are the main characters (Ram, Jake, Alex, Julie) role models? Explain.
8. Both Jake and Ram have different girls tell them they're beautiful. Do you think these girls are talking about how the two boys look? Or something else? Explain your answer and use examples from the novel to support it. Do you know anyone you would call beautiful? In what way are they beautiful?

9. When Ram hears what his father says he thinks, “I hated God for giving me a heart. What good were they? Hearts? Having one got me exactly where?” (p. 264). Do you understand how Ram is feeling and what he’s trying to express? Have you ever felt this way? Do you think any good comes from having a heart? Or would we be better off without the ability to feel such strong emotions? Explain 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 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>.