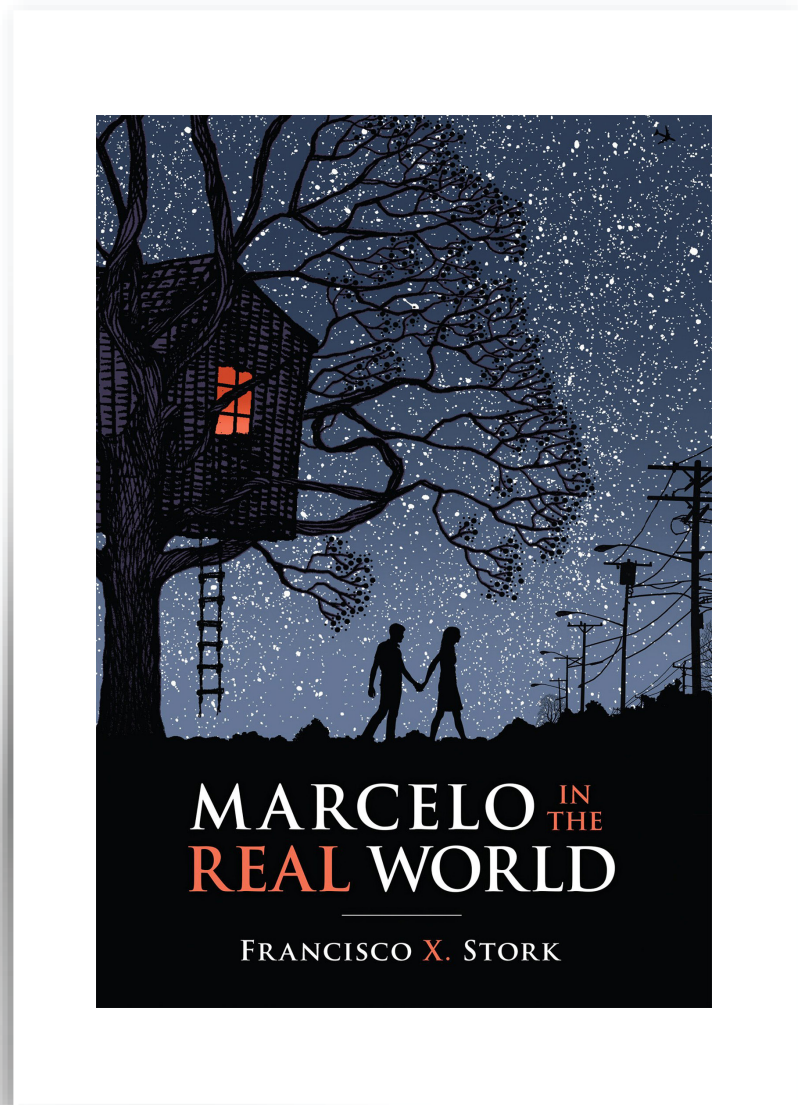


VAMOS A LEER

teaching latin america through literacy



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Educator's Guide

Marcelo in the Real World

Written by Francisco X. Stork

Published by Scholastic Books, 2009

ISBN: 9780545056908

Age Level: 14 and up



BOOK SUMMARY

Marcelo Sandoval hears music no one else can hear--part of the autism-like impairment no doctor has been able to identify--and he's always attended a special school where his differences have been protected. But the summer after his junior year, his father demands that Marcelo work in his law firm's mailroom in order to experience "the real world." There Marcelo meets Jasmine, his beautiful and surprising coworker, and Wendell, the son of another partner in the firm.

He learns about competition and jealousy, anger and desire. But it's a picture he finds in a file -- a picture of a girl with half a face -- that truly connects him with the real world: its suffering, its injustice, and what he can do to fight.

Reminiscent of "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" in the intensity and purity of its voice, this extraordinary novel is a love story, a legal drama, and a celebration of the music each of us hears inside.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:

- 2010 Once Upon a World Children's Book Award for Young Adults (Awarded by the Simon Wiesenthal Center and Museum of Tolerance Library and Archives)
- New York Times Notable Children's Book of 2009
- Washington Post Best Kids' Books of the Year

- Smithsonian Notable Book of 2009
- A YALSA Best Book for Young Adults, 2010
- 2009 Booklist Editors' Choice
- Horn Book Fanfare Book
- Kirkus Best Book of 2009
- Publishers Weekly Best Book of 2009
- School Library Journal Best Book of 2009
- CBC/NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People 2010
- 2010 IRA Notable Books for a Global Society

AUTHOR'S CORNER

About Francisco X. Stork:

Francisco Stork works in Boston as an attorney for a state agency that develops affordable housing. He is married to Jill Syverson-Stork. He has two children who are now adults.



Stork was born in 1953 in Monterrey, Mexico. Ruth Arguelles, his mother, was a single mother from a middle class family in Tampico (a city on the Gulf of Mexico). The reason Francisco was born in Monterrey rather than in Tampico, where Ruth lived, is that her father did not want anyone to know that she was going to have a child out of wedlock. She was sent to Monterrey to live in a convent until the baby was born. The baby was supposed to be given up for adoption, but Ruth changed her mind. After a while, Grandfather Adalberto relented and mother and baby Francisco were allowed to come home.

Six years later Ruth married Charles Stork, a retired man more than twenty years her senior. Charles Stork adopted Francisco and gave him his name. Charlie was a kind but strict Dutch man who quickly went about instilling needed discipline in his new son. For his seventh birthday, Charlie gave Francisco a portable typewriter because Francisco announced that he wanted to be a writer. After wandering about Mexico for a few years trying to live on a Social Security pension, Charlie decided to bring the family to the United States where he hoped they would fare better.

The three of them came to El Paso, Texas when Francisco was nine. Charlie, an American citizen was able to obtain the necessary visas for Ruth and Francisco. Francisco was sent to grammar school where he learned English on the go. Unfortunately, no one was willing to give the sixty-five-year-old Charlie a job and so it became even harder for the family to survive in the United States. They lived in a variety of apartments and trailer houses staying in each for as long as possible before getting evicted.

When Francisco was thirteen, Charlie Stork died in an automobile accident. Ruth decided to stay in the United States. She and the boy obtained an apartment in one of the public housing projects of El Paso. Francisco was awarded a scholarship to the local Jesuit High School and soon rose to the top of his class. During his senior year, he received an Honor's Scholarship (full tuition and living expenses) to attend Spring Hill College, a small Jesuit College in Mobile Alabama.

At Spring Hill College, Francisco majored in English Literature and Philosophy and received the college's creative writing award. After college, a Danforth Fellowship (awarded to 40 college seniors out of approximately 5,000 applicants) allowed him to attend graduate school at Harvard University. At Harvard he studied Latin American Literature with people like Octavio Paz, the Mexican Nobel Laureate. However, the emphasis on

scholarly research and writing seemed too remote and irrelevant to all that was important. So, after four years of Harvard, Francisco went to Columbia Law School. His plan was to make a living as a lawyer without abandoning his plan to write fiction. Twenty years and twelve or so legal jobs later, Francisco published his first novel.

Check out [Francisco X. Stork's](#) website for more information about the author.

**USING
MARCELO IN
THE REAL
WORLD
IN THE
CLASSROOM**

Marcelo has become one of my favorite protagonists. He is very different from many of the main characters in other books we've read here at Vamos a Leer. Marcelo is a seventeen year old on the autism spectrum. He says of himself, ". . .the closest description of my condition is Asperger's syndrome. . ." (p. 55). How often are we given a book that provides our students any insight into what it might be like to experience the world with autism or Asperger's syndrome? This alone makes it a significant book. Marcelo is also an introvert. He lives in a tree house behind his family's home. He has an incredibly rich inner life filled with the "internal music" he hears, and he thinks deeply about all things religious as religion is his special interest. He also develops very close relationships with animals. At school he helps to train the therapy ponies, and at home he is always accompanied by his dog Namu. As an introverted, animal lover who studied religion for my B.A., it's not difficult to see why Marcelo would appeal to me. But, I find Marcelo captivating for much more than just the ways I can personally identify with him. Marcelo represents so many of our students who are 'different,' who don't quite fit into what we have come to expect of a 'typical teenager.' School can be quite brutal for these students. Marcelo provides a window into what it's like to be that 'atypical' teenager—and challenges many of the preconceived misconceptions we have about these students.

Educators conduct research projects on how we can encourage understanding, empathy or compassion in our students. For me, great literature is always a way to do that. A well-written character allows us to see, maybe even experience, life through someone else's eyes. Readers get to do that with Marcelo, and I believe that many of our students will be surprised by what they learn from him. Marcelo struggles with so many of the same things that the students in our schools must deal with on a daily basis. He's asking the same questions that they ask themselves: Who am I? How much am I willing to change to fit in? What does it mean to succeed? How do I determine what is right or wrong? How do I make sense of the world around me? Despite the fact that so many of us know teenagers are struggling to answer questions like these, we rarely find time to make these discussions relevant and real parts of our curriculum. A novel like this provides one way to do that.

In asking questions like those above, Marcelo challenges much of what we consider 'the real world.' Marcelo is clearly grappling with the significance of his own morality, particularly in light of his religion or spirituality, but the religious aspects of the book are never over-bearing or preachy. In fact,

his conversations with Rabbi Herschel are some of my favorite parts of the book. While Marcelo is Catholic, he often meets with Rabbi Herschel to discuss the various religious texts he's reading and get her thoughts or interpretations. These conversations are in turn both comic relief and heart-breaking.

The summer at the law firm is a life-changing experience for Marcelo. He finds himself giving up a great deal of what he thought he wanted and needed. It's certainly a powerful coming of age story. One that I hope we will find in many classrooms and school libraries.

Marcelo in the Real World has received a number of awards and recognitions as a New York Times Notable Children's Book of 2009, a Washington Post Best Kids' Books of the Year, a Smithsonian Notable Book of 2009, A YALSA Best Book for Young Adults, 2010, a Kirkus Best Book of 2009, and a School Library Journal Best Book of 2009. I hope you'll consider adding it to your classroom library.

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

- [New York Times Book Review](#)
- [Molly @ Wrapped Up in Books](#)
- [AMB @ The Misfortune of Knowing](#)

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

- [Scholastic interviews Francisco X. Stork](#)

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

- [Marcelo in the Real World Book Trailer](#)

LESSON PLANS & ACTIVITIES

The following lesson plans are comprised of 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:

- [Scholastic's Discussion Guide](#)

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

- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Guided Reading Questions

Chapter 1 | Pages 1-9

1. What is the difference between the “mental music” and the “real stuff”? (p. 1-2)

2. How does Marcelo describe the mental music? What two metaphors does he use to explain his mental music? (p. 3-4)
3. What do Aurora and Dr. Malone discuss after the doctor's appointment? How does Marcelo feel about this? (p. 8-9)

Chapter 2 | Pages 10-16

1. What is Marcelo's job at Paterson for the summer? Is he excited about it? (p. 10-11)
2. What are the horses used for at Paterson?
3. Marcelo uses a number of clues to figure out what he thinks his father, Arturo, wants—what is it that he wants Marcelo to do? How does Marcelo feel about this? (p. 15-16)

Chapter 3 | Pages 17-24

1. What is Arturo's proposition? (p. 19)
2. Why does Arturo want Marcelo to have this job? (p. 19-20)
3. What are the rules of the real world for Marcelo? (p. 20-21)
4. How will Marcelo's success be judged or determined? (p. 21-22)

Chapter 4 | Pages 25-35

1. Compare Marcelo's conversation with his mother to the one with his father. How are the two different? Based on these two conversations, how would you compare the relationship Marcelo has with his mother to that with his father? (p. 27-34)

Chapter 5 | Pages 36-46

1. What do you think of Marcelo's morning schedule? Do you have a morning schedule? How does it compare? (p. 36-37)
2. What advice does Marcelo's sister, Yolanda, give him about working at the law firm? Based on his sister's advice, predict what you think the law firm will be like for Marcelo. (p. 39)
3. What does Arturo explain to Marcelo about the real world working environment? (p.41-46)
4. Do you think that all jobs are like the battle or war that Arturo describes? Why or Why not? (p. 45-46)
5. Predict: How do you think Marcelo will do at his new job? Why? (p. 46)

Chapter 6 | Pages 47-62

1. How does Marcelo describe himself to Jasmine? (p. 55)
2. Why is Jasmine upset that Marcelo is working there? (p. 59)
3. What is your first impression of the law firm where Marcelo will be working? Why? (p. 62)

Chapter 7 | Pages 63-73

1. Why is Marcelo surprised that Arturo describes him as having a cognitive disorder? How does this contradict what Arturo has done Marcelo's entire life? (p. 63)
2. Who is Forest Gump? Do you think that it's appropriate that Stephen Holmes calls Marcelo that? Does he mean it as a compliment or an insult? (p. 65-66)
3. Based on Marcelo's meeting with Stephen Holmes, how would you describe Stephen Holmes as a person? Why? (p. 67)
4. Predict what you think Stephen Holmes' son Wendell will be like. (p. 68)
5. Now that Marcelo has met Wendell, how would you describe him?

Was your prediction correct? (p. 69-72)

6. Why do you think Marcelo cries when he sees Jasmine's list? (p. 72-73)

Chapter 8 | Pages 74-84

1. What is the difference between large and small talk? What did Marcelo do the most of when he was at Paterson? What do you think most of your conversations are made up of? (p. 74-76)
2. How does Marcelo determine if someone is angry? (p. 78)
3. How is Jasmine different from the other people who work at the firm? (p. 78)
4. Describe how Jasmine handles the situation with Beth in the mailroom. Do you think that it is effective? (p. 80-81)

Chapter 9 | Pages 85-92

1. What are most of Marcelo's conversations with Wendell about? (p. 86)
2. How does Jasmine describe Wendell? Do you think she is correct? How does she describe what a lack of trust is like? Have you ever felt that before? (p. 91)

Chapter 10 | Pages 93-103

1. What has happened to the IM since Marcelo started working at the law firm? Why do you think this is happening? (p. 93-94)
2. Where does Arturo take Marcelo for their lunch break? Does Marcelo want to go? (p. 94-95)
3. Is it easy for Marcelo to talk with his father? Does he want to talk more with his father? Have you ever been in a similar situation? (p. 98)
4. How does Marcelo feel after hearing about the case his father is working on? Why do you think he feels this way? (p. 101-102)
5. Who does Arturo encourage Marcelo to be friends with? Do you think this is good advice? Who would you tell Marcelo to befriend? (p. 103)

Chapter 11 | Pages 104-113

1. Why does Marcelo think that Al likes Jasmine? Do you think that Marcelo is good at understanding people? Why or why not? Think about what he notices about Al and his conversation with Jasmine as they walk back to the office. (p. 105-109)
2. What kind of park does Jasmine take Marcelo to? Describe it. (p. 112)

Chapter 12 | Pages 114-120

1. Why does Marcelo ask about the passage in Genesis? (p. 116) How does Rabbi Herschel explain it? (p. 118)

Chapter 13 | Pages 121-134

1. What does Wendell want from Marcelo? (p. 122)
2. Do you think Wendell really cares about Jasmine? Why or why not? (p. 122)
3. What is Wendell's plan for getting Jasmine? How does he want Marcelo to help? Do you think Marcelo should help him? (p. 123)
4. How does Wendell respond when Marcelo tells him no? (p. 126)
5. What is Wendell's plan for helping Marcelo to succeed at the law firm? What does Marcelo have to do in return? Do you think this is

a wise agreement for Marcelo? (p. 132-133)

Chapter 14 | Pages 135-147

1. How does the city reflect what Marcelo is feeling after lunch with Wendell? (p. 136)
2. Who comes to find Marcelo? (p. 138)
3. Why can't Marcelo tell Jasmine how he's feeling? (p. 138-140)
4. What does Jasmine share with Marcelo about her brother? (p. 141-143)
5. What does Marcelo learn about Jasmine when they visit her apartment? (p. 145-146)

Chapter 15 | Pages 148-156

1. What is the Vidromek case about? (p. 149)
2. Marcelo is pulled in two contradictory directions? Describe what they are. (p. 152)
3. How does the picture affect Marcelo? (p. 154)

Chapter 16 | Pages 157-159

1. How does Marcelo process his reaction to the picture? What does he think about and compare it to? (p. 157-158)
2. Do you think the author is foreshadowing something when he ends the chapter with "He decides to take the steeper path"? Why or why not? What could he be foretelling? (p. 159)

Chapter 17 | Pages 160-169

1. Why is Marcelo so interested in the girl from the photo? (p. 165-166)
2. What do you think of Jasmine's advice, "The right note sounds right and the wrong note sounds wrong"? Would that help you decide how to make the right decision? (p. 169)

Chapter 18 | Pages 170-182

1. What does Marcelo realize that he has gotten better at? (p. 177)
2. Why is the lawyer whose office Marcelo is using being fired? (p. 173)
3. What do Jasmine and Marcelo learn from the picture? (p. 179-182)
4. What is the plan to find the girl from the photo? (p. 182)

Chapter 19 | Pages 183-197

1. Where do Jasmine and Marcelo believe the photo was taken? Why? (p.183)
2. How does Marcelo respond to Jerry Garcia's question "You're on the autism spectrum, aren't you?" What has changed over the summer for Marcelo in terms of this question? (p. 185-186)
3. How does Arturo explain the path he takes to Jerry Garcia when they are in law school? How does this describe Arturo's law practice career? (p. 190-191)
4. What does Marcelo learn from Jerry Garcia's letter? (p. 192-193)
5. What does Jerry Garcia need in order to help Ixtel? (p. 195-196)
6. Compare Jerry Garcia and Arturo and what they've chosen to do with their law careers. How are the two men different? Why are their law offices so different? (p. 185-196)

Chapter 20 | Pages 198-208

1. Do you think Wendell is taking advantage of Marcelo? Why or why not? (199-200)

2. What errand does Wendell want Marcelo to do? Do you think it's right that Wendell asks Marcelo to do this? (p. 199-200)
3. Why does Stephen Holmes fire Robert Steely? What did Steeley suggest? (p. 205)
4. Does Steeley help Marcelo? (p. 206-208)

Chapter 21 | Pages 209-215

1. How is Marcelo's interaction with his father in the hallway different from previous interactions? What does Marcelo do that he's never done before? (p. 209-210)
2. What are the possible ramifications or consequences of using the material in the folder? (p. 211-231)
3. What does Jasmine suggest they do to help Marcelo think through the decision he must make? (p. 214-215)

Chapter 22 | Pages 216-230

1. How did Aurora react to Marcelo's news about the trip with Jasmine? How did Arturo respond? Why was Marcelo confused about his response? Why do you think Arturo reacted the way he did? (p. 216-217)
2. What is Jasmine's dad like? How would you describe him? (p. 223-225)
3. Describe Jasmine's home in Vermont. Does it have all of the amenities that you're accustomed to? (p. 223-228)

Chapter 23 | Pages 231-246

1. What do Jonah and Marcelo discuss during their "heart-to-heart"? (p. 237-241)
2. What are Jasmine's plans for the future? How is she preparing for them? (p. 243-244)

Chapter 24 | Pages 247-262

1. Where will Jasmine and Marcelo camp? What does Amos do in the winter at Hidden Lake? (p. 250)
2. What conflicting feelings does Marcelo have over what to do in regards to the file? (p. 252-253)

Chapter 25 | Pages 262-266

1. What does Wendell give to Marcelo? Why do you think Wendell does this? (p. 264-265)
2. What does Marcelo learn from the letter? (p. 265-266)
3. What does Marcelo do after he reads the letter? How does he feel? How would you respond if you were Marcelo? (p. 266)

Chapter 26 | Pages 267-279

1. Why is Aurora worried about Marcelo? How has he changed? (p. 267-268)
2. Why has Marcelo lost his special interest in religion? How does Rabbi Herschel respond? (p. 273)
3. What advice does Rabbi Herschel give to Marcelo? How does she offer this advice? What do her stories or explanations mean? (p. 267-269)

Chapter 27 | Pages 280-282

1. What does Marcelo decide to do with the memo? (p. 280-281)
2. What does this mean for Marcelo? What ramifications will this have on Marcelo and the school he attends? (p. 281)

Chapter 28 | Pages 283-290

1. What does Marcelo realize about Wendell? (p. 285)
2. How does the conversation go between Marcelo and his father? (p. 287-290)
3. What reasoning do Wendell and Arturo use for withholding the memo? Do they believe they did anything wrong? (p. 288, 285)
4. What does Marcelo do with Jasmine's letter? (p. 290)

Chapter 29 | Pages 291-300

1. What is the place where Ixtel lives like? Describe it. (p. 292-294)
2. What does Marcelo learn from talking with Ixtel? (p. 298-299)

Chapter 30 | Pages 301-303

1. How is the pain at Patterson different from the pain Marcelo sees in the 'real world'? (p. 302)
2. How does Marcelo think that Oak Ridge will help him? (p. 303)
3. What are Marcelo's plans for the future? (p. 303)

Chapter 31 | Pages 304-312

1. How does Jasmine explain the note and what happened with Arturo to Marcelo? (p. 307)
2. What are Marcelo's plans in regards to Vermont? Why does he want to go there? (p. 310)
3. Why do you think Marcelo's plans make Jasmine happy? (p. 311-312)

**Reflective
Writing
Questions**

1. Having read the book, what do you think the 'moral' of the story is? What is the lesson(s) that the reader learns through the novel? Explain your answer.
2. Is Marcelo's experience at the law firm a good one? How would you describe his summer?
3. Marcelo's summer job is a life changing experience for him. Have you ever had a life changing experience like that? What was it and how did it change you?
4. What do you think Marcelo learned from his work at the law firm? How has he changed over the course of the novel? Do you think he would have been better off working at Paterson for the summer and continuing there in the fall? Why or why not?
5. What did you know about autism or people on the autism spectrum before reading the book? Have you ever known anyone with autism? What did you learn about this disability from reading the book? If you meet someone now, after reading this novel, how will you interact with that person? Do you think the book changed how you might perceive them?

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.

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>.