

REPRESENTATIONS:

"DEATH OF AN ASSASSIN"

BY VICTOR VILLASEÑOR

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION¹²

Best-selling novelist Victor Villaseñor grew up with the stories of magic and wonder that are contained within *Walking Stars: Stories of Magic and Power*. Within its pages is a cast of dogs and horses and wild, lovable children and teenagers whose perseverance take them to stardom, but not the stardom found on television and the popular media. This is the brilliance of becoming strong, confident walking stars, humans who are able to bring positive, magical change to society against all odds.

The tales, set to the backdrop of the Mexican Revolution and his family's immigration to the United States, all involve young people overcoming physical, emotional, and psychological barriers during times of extreme stress. The over-riding message of Villaseñor's exciting narrations is that we can all be heroes. Especially young people, who have the power to create their own futures, can find within themselves the power to achieve great feats of skill and courage.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in the barrio of Carlsbad, California, in 1940, Victor Villaseñor was raised on a ranch four miles north in Oceanside. Since his parents were born in Mexico, Villaseñor spoke only Spanish when he started school. After years of facing language and cultural barriers, heavy discrimination and a reading problem, later diagnosed as dyslexia, Victor dropped out of high school his junior year and moved to Mexico. There he discovered a wealth of Mexican art, literature, music, that helped him recapture and understand the dignity and richness of his heritage.

Victor returned to the U.S. at the age of 20. He began to feel the old frustration and anger return as he once again witnessed the disregard toward poor and uneducated people and especially toward the Mexicans. Then a chance encounter with James Joyce's *Portrait Of An Artist As A Young Man*, changed Victor's life. It awakened a desire to confront through literature the problems associated with his cultural heritage that continued to plague him.

After producing 9 novels, 65 short stories, and receiving 265 rejections, Villaseñor sold his first novel, *Macho!*, which the Los Angeles Times compared to the best of John Steinbeck. This began a

¹² Reprinted, in part, from the author's website at <http://victorvillasenor.com>.

journey that would eventually lead to the publication of the national bestseller *Rain of Gold*. Used by thousands of teachers and school systems across the nation as required reading, *Rain of Gold* tells the story of Victor's family, taking the reader from war-torn Mexico during the Revolution of 1910 to the present day.

PROCESS

Using the excerpt included in the following pages, ask students to read Villaseñor's writing. As they read, ask students to note anything they learn that may help them understand what it was like to live through the Revolution, or anything about specific events or figures already discussed. If students read *Los de Abajo/The Underdogs* or Campobello's *Cartucho* excerpts, ask them to compare and contrast Villaseñor's portrayal of the Revolution with those provided by Azuela and Campobello.

See the appendix of this guide for a PDF of "Death of an Assassin," one of the stories from *Walking Stars: Stories of Magic and Power*. The story is set at the beginning of the Mexican Revolution when Villa's forces were still fighting the Federales. Because the story is told from the point of view of two young boys, students will experience through their eyes what it was like to live during the Revolution.

Once students have read the excerpt, discuss what they thought of it. Use the following questions to guide the conversation:

1. Did they learn anything new about the Revolution?
2. Which revolutionary leaders were portrayed in the story?
3. How were they portrayed?
4. Were the descriptions of the Revolution or its leaders different than in the other reading selections?
5. How did Villaseñor's description of the Federales compare to Azuela's?
6. What kind of men were the Federales according to Villaseñor?
7. What was it like to live as a townspeople (someone not fighting as a soldier) during the Revolution?
8. Would you have wanted to be alive in Mexico during this time period?