

# Teacher's Guide for the Novel *Muchacho*

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Please visit [www.louannejohnson.com](http://www.louannejohnson.com) to find a free **Student Reader Guide** for **Muchacho** and links to information of interest to teachers, parents and students.

# INTRODUCTION

## Hello, Fellow Teacher!

First, let me thank you for teaching. It's one of the most difficult and demanding jobs in the world – but also one of the most important (as you know) and occasionally one of the most rewarding (as I *hope* you know!).

As a high school English teacher and developmental level college instructor, I understand how much work is involved in creating curriculum for close reading of a novel. So, I have prepared a full outline of assignments that can be used in conjunction with the novel *Muchacho*.)



You will notice that there are no matching, fill-in-the-blank or multiple choice questions included here. I think it fosters higher level thinking skills when students have to create their own answers to questions about the reading. In my experience, they respond much more positively and progress much farther as students of literature when they don't feel that they are being "tested" on their reading, but instead are asked to think about the reading selections and articulate their own thoughts, reactions and ideas. Even if this approach feels a bit strange to you, I urge you to give it a try and see how your students respond. My prediction is that they will write increasingly longer, more thoughtful and more creative answers to the questions in the assignments than if you had given them ready-made answers from which they could choose.

In addition to this guide, my website also contains direct links to information of interest to teachers – light sensitivity, the link between essential fats and brain activity, etc.

Happy reading!

*LouAnne Johnson*

[www.louannejohnson.com](http://www.louannejohnson.com)

*P.S. If your students are reading Muchacho and have questions they'd like to ask me, just send me an email via my website. And if you want me to write a letter to your class, I'd be happy to.*

# LESSON PLANS

Lesson plans are included for each chapter of *Muchacho*. Each follows the same format:

- Synopsis:** A brief summary of the chapter.
- Kick-Off Questions:** Pre-reading questions for class discussion – to create interest and get students thinking about subjects that will be introduced.
- Reader Reactions:** Post-reading discussion questions to encourage analysis of the chapter and prepare students for journal writing assignments.  
(If discussions don't work in your setting, these can serve as short individual student assignments.)
- \*Ready, Set, Write:** Three choices for student journal writing.
- Information, Please:** Short individual projects for Internet or library research.
- Get It Together:** Group projects and activities designed to inspire inquiry and provide additional information about topics and themes addressed in the chapter.

## \*Suggestions for Using Student Journals:

When students try to edit their work as they write, they tend to limit their vocabulary, writing style and thoughts in order to avoid making mistakes. Therefore, I suggest:

- DO focus on the ideas and thoughts presented in student journals.
- DON'T grade journal writing on spelling, grammar, composition, etc
- DO assign full credit for writing that indicates thought and effort.

This method will result in some grammatically imperfect journals earning higher grades than perfectly boring and correct writing that shows no effort or thought involved.

### ***But I'm supposed to be teaching students to use proper English!***

Don't worry. Once students have a selection of journal assignments completed, they can choose one to rewrite and submit for a grade as a formal essay. Then they can focus on revising, correct any errors – and impress you with their grammatical skills.

### ***My students hate writing. It's like pulling teeth.***

If your focus is on *what* they have to say instead of *how* they say it, students will be more inclined to write longer and better essays. Reluctant writers often fear that they won't have "the right answer" or that they won't be able to express the answer in "the right words." Those students need reassurance (and proof) that you are interested in their opinions, and as long as they can show something from the book that supports an opinion, there is no such thing as a 'wrong answer' when it comes to analyzing a story.

***How much should students write?***

My own approach is to ask middle school students and high school freshman to try to write a full page in response to the journal prompts. (*If they write in HUGE LETTERS to take up space, they must write two pages.*) High school sophomores can be expected to write 1 ½ to 2 pages, juniors and seniors at least 2 pages.

***How am I supposed to find time to read all those journals?***

Students often complain that teachers assign journals but don't read them. Just putting a check on the top of the page without making any comments gives the impression that you aren't interested in what the student had to say. You don't have to read every single word, but you can skim the journal and find some spot where you can insert a comment. Even a simple "Oh, my!" "Nice!" or "Interesting!" can provide sufficient encouragement to a reluctant writer. Occasionally, during the first few chapters, write a longer response in each student's journal so they can see that you are reading their work.

## MOTIVATING RELUCTANT READERS

*Please* don't force students to read out loud in your class in front of their peers. There are many reasons why students don't want to read aloud – lisps, acne, shyness, accents, embarrassment about their unfashionable clothing or their bodies. Forcing students to read aloud can turn them into lifelong book haters. Many students would rather be sent to detention or punished at home than to risk looking foolish in front of their peers (one boy told me he would rather flunk out of school than have to stand in front of the room – he was serious). So, as long as they aren't disruptive, just let your non-readers listen to others read – it's an excellent way to learn. Babies do it all the time.

One of my students explained, "My father can make me sit and hold the book, but he can't make me read." That student was right. You can't **make** anybody read. so why waste your time on that pointless battle? As long as students don't disrupt the class, let them listen in peace and pretend they don't care. Focus on those students who are interested in learning. When we reward positive behavior, we see more of it. Just as we see more negative behavior when we spend our time and effort punishing students.

Some students may refuse to read simply to get the teacher's attention. Ignore them. Focus your attention on the students who cooperate. Make it clear that those who cooperate in your classroom earn much more attention than those who don't. If you select interesting reading materials, most students will eventually give up and start reading. Some "tough nuts" may feel that they have to maintain their reputations as non-readers, much as Eddie does at the beginning of the book. Don't let them fool you. Instead, continue to demonstrate your enthusiasm for reading. Kids place much more emphasis on what we do than what we say. Show them that you truly value books.

## LIGHT SENSITIVITY

Many reluctant readers suffer from scotopic (light) sensitivity.

\* Research shows that about 50% of people who are labeled as “learning disabled” actually suffer from light sensitivity. Fluorescent lighting gives them a headache. So does reading high-contrast print, such as black letters on white pages. Glossy paper can create a painful glare. Letters may actually seem to “swim” across the pages.

\* Light sensitivity is often misdiagnosed as dyslexia. Some people with light sensitivity do suffer from dyslexia, but until you address the light sensitivity, the interventions designed to help dyslexic readers will be of little use.

\*The solution to light sensitivity is simple -- a colored transparency can be placed over the page while reading. Often, nonreaders will become readers instantly upon using the transparencies which can be purchased from a number of sources. In a pinch, you can use those inexpensive transparent report covers made by many office supply companies.

\* Indications that a student may be sensitive to light:

- fidgets constantly while reading
- squints or rubs eyes; eyes may become red or watery
- complains of headache after reading
- wants to wear sunglasses or a hat with a visor all the time
- becomes disruptive when individual silent reading is required
- prefers to read outside or near a window with natural sunlight
- uses body to shield books and create a shadow over the page

## GROUP ACTIVITIES - the bully problem

Assigning students to work in pairs, groups or teams can cause problems for teachers who aren't aware of all the friction and conflicts among students. Before you assign group activities, remind students that such work requires a higher level of maturity and responsibility from them. If possible, those students who simply cannot behave in group settings should be sent to the library or someplace quiet where they can complete the assignment by themselves.

Many behavior problems can be avoided by using this simple system (make sure students know each other's names before you do this exercise):

1. Ask students to write their own names on a sheet of paper.
2. Ask students to list the names of 4 or 5 students they would prefer to work with.
3. Ask students to list the names of 1 or 2 students they *never* want to work with.
4. Take those lists home and tally them up. The names that appear repeatedly are your bullies – and your outcasts.
5. Do not place students into groups with their *Do Not Work With* lists.

Try to help the bullies and outcasts in your class learn better social skills. Send them to a counselor for help, if necessary. But don't ignore them. Outcasts often become victims of aggressive behavior and end up becoming violent themselves. If your school doesn't have a mentor program, you may consider starting one. Or try to find a staff member (don't overlook bus drivers, custodians and librarians) who would be willing to take an interest and spend some time talking with a student. Another good idea is to assign both bullies and outcasts to work at student aides or helpers in the office, library or classroom. A little responsibility and attention can go a long way.

## THE STUDENT READER GUIDE

On my website, [www.louannejohnson.com](http://www.louannejohnson.com) you will find a *Muchacho* Student Reader Guide PDF document. This short document includes information about things the *Dangerous Minds* students found helpful: thinking skills, light sensitivity, writing in the student's unique voice, and advice and encouragement for students who hate reading. I was going to include journal prompts in the reader guide, but decided to include them in the teacher's guide instead (Ready, Set, Write). That will allow more flexibility for the journal format - individual sheets of paper, notebooks, etc.

The journals are designed to encourage students to engage with the text, analyze the characters and their motivation, consider the setting, and predict the plot. In addition to the literary analysis, the final category of student questions (*What About You?*) are intended to gently guide the student into self-analysis, encouraging reflection about their own attitudes towards education, their goals and expectations for the future, and how strongly their own behavior and thoughts affect their day-to-day lives. Hopefully, as they work through the book and consider the questions, students will come to the realization that they are not powerless and that they can, as Eddie says, "create the intention to be a success."

## READABILITY

I used software to analyze each chapter separately, then I averaged the numbers. The program gave ratings for a number of measurements. These are the results of the analysis: Flesch Reading Ease – 72.29; Gunning Fog Index – 10.3; Coleman Liau Index – 6.90; Flesh Kincaid Grade Level – 8.35 ; ARI – 8.38; SMOG – 9.12

I also gave copies of the book to two teenagers – one honor student and one potential dropout who is currently on out-of-school suspension. Both students read the book in one sitting and then recommended that their parents read it. I consider that unscientific test at least as valid as the computerized analysis.

## Chapter 1 - Beecher at the Library

### Synopsis:

Eddie sees his former teacher, Miss Beecher, working as a librarian. He doesn't speak to her, but recalls the brief time that Beecher was a teacher at Bright Horizons Alternative School. We learn that: Eddie is Hispanic; Beecher is Anglo and earning her alternative teaching certification; T.J. Ritchie is the big, tough drug dealer in their school; their new English teacher is a 'wussie' named McElroy; Eddie doesn't trust teachers; Beecher was an exceptional teacher who treated students with utmost respect; Eddie believes that Beecher lost her job for being a "liberal intellectual."

### Kick-Off Questions:

What is your opinion of alternative schools and special programs for students who don't do well in the traditional school setting?

Did you ever have a really good teacher? Why was this teacher good?

What makes students respect – or not respect – a teacher?

### Reader Reactions:

What kind of person is Eddie? Give an example from the book to support your opinion.

Eddie knows how to use good grammar, but sometimes he uses bad grammar. Most of us do the same thing. Why do we intentionally use bad grammar and say things such as "It ain't gonna happen," or "You got a problem?"

### Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.

Describe the best or worst teacher you had in elementary school.

If you were a teacher, what would you do on the first day of class to get control or to create a good relationship with your students?

If you could change one thing about your school, what would you change and why?

### Information, Please:

Eddie says that New Mexico has a very low literacy. How does your state compare to other states when it comes to student achievement in reading and math? Why do you think your state has such high or low test scores?

### Get it Together:

Working in small groups, ask students to create a list of the **Top Five Things a Good Teacher Should Do** and the **Top Five Things a Good Teacher Should Never Do**. Set a time limit (15-20 minutes) for the project to keep students on task. Then, ask each group to appoint a spokesperson to present their lists to the class. If you have time and materials, ask students to create a visual presentation of their lists on poster board or on the classroom white/chalk board.

## Chapter 2 - Getting Rid of a Teacher

### Synopsis:

Eddie describes how easy it is for him and his classmates to get rid of teachers – two minutes is their all-time record. They thought Beecher might last an entire year, but then she mentioned masturbation during an informal discussion about sex. She wasn't fired for that comment, but for reading aloud a Halloween story that contained a swear word. T.J. Ritchie's mother complained that Beecher was preaching Satanism. As Beecher prepares to leave, Eddie recalls a journal entry he wrote but never turned in, about watching his older cousin kill somebody. Eddie thinks Beecher will end up teaching on an Indian reservation, something she had talked about doing.

### Kick-Off Questions:

Should teachers be allowed to discuss sex or religion, if students ask them to? Why?

What constitute good reasons for firing a teacher?

Have you ever had a teacher who quit or was fired? How did you feel about it?

### Reader Reactions:

Do you think Eddie will graduate some day? Why or why not?

What kind of sex education programs should schools have?

Why would a school fire a teacher after complaints from just one parent?

### Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list

What do you think about the current situation of most American Indian tribes?

Tell about a time something happened to you when you were young but you were afraid to tell anybody (this will remain confidential).

Joey Dinwiddie wants to get married. What do you think his life would be like if he got married at age 16 or 17?

### Information, Please:

What famous story is Danny Clodfelter referring to when he talks about a man who sold his watch to buy hair combs for his wife (who sold her hair to buy him a watch)? Do people still sell their hair today? Why?

### Get It Together:

Working in teams or groups, find out the following: Are there American Indian tribes living in your state now? Were there in the past? If not, choose a state near yours where there are Indians. Describe the customs and history of the Indians in your state. Prepare a brief oral report, with visuals, for your group to present to the class. [If you live on a reservation, explain how your tribe's customs differ from those of the non-Indians who live in your state. Prepare and present an oral report, with visuals, for the class.]

## Chapter 3 – Back Where You Came From

### Synopsis:

A new kid in class from Ohio insults New Mexicans and Henry Dominguez tells him to go back where he came from. Eddie feels some sympathy for the Ohio boy because he has often been told the same thing – but he points out that he is where he came from. New Mexico used to be Mexico, along with Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona and other states. Eddie wonders what would happen if Canada invaded the U.S. as the U.S. once invaded Mexico.

### Kick-Off Questions:

What do you think of the idea of building a wall between the U.S. and Mexico?

Have you ever tried to learn a foreign language? If so, how did you feel? If you haven't tried, what foreign language would you choose to learn and why?

Why do some people want to make English the official language of the U.S.?

### Reader Reactions:

What could you do, individually, to help new kids feel more comfortable at school?

What kind of program could your school create to help new kids feel better and less lonely?

### Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.

Scientists have proved that humans are all 99.9% the same. So why do people still have so many conflicts over race and ethnic background?

Tell about a time when you were the new kid in a class or in a school.

Tell about a time when you either picked on or were kind to a new kid at school.

### Information, Please:

When did your state become part of the U.S? What ethnic group(s) made up the first people from your state? Does your state have that same ethnic makeup today?

### Get It Together:

*When* and *how* did so many states that used to be Mexican territory end up as part of the U.S? Create a map that shows how Mexico and the U.S. used to be divided and how they are now.

## Chapter 4 – Just Say No

### Synopsis:

Eddie explains why he thinks Just Say No is a lame idea – people can't just say no, otherwise people could easily quit smoking and girls wouldn't suffer from anorexia, etc.. Life is not that easy. Bobby Chavez said no to a drug dealer and the dealer killed him. The news media reported that Bobby had been involved in selling or buying drugs, which wasn't true, but nobody listened to the students who defended Bobby's honor. The same dealers came after Eddie when he was walking alone, so he and his cousins formed a gang so they wouldn't have to walk alone. Eddie doesn't trust the police to protect him because, as he says, "if you're a Mexican kid from a poor neighborhood, they figure you're theirs sooner or later and it might as well be sooner."

### Kick-Off Questions:

How does it feel to be accused of something you didn't do?

What do you think of the slogan *Just Say No*? What might be more effective?

### Reader Reactions:

What other options did Eddie have, other than forming a gang?

What are other examples of news stories that were inaccurately reported?

### Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.

Tell about a time when you were "in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Describe somebody you admire (how do they look, talk, walk, dress, etc?) and tell *why* you admire this person.

Physical appearance is only part of the story – what other characteristics make a person really attractive? Describe your "most beautiful person" (real or imaginary).

### Information, Please:

How many girls in the U.S. suffer from anorexia and bulimia? Do boys ever get these conditions?

### Get It Together:

Research and locate two countries or cultures with very different images of what a beautiful person looks like. Draw pictures or find pictures on the Internet or in the library that illustrate these differences. Appoint a spokesperson from your group to present your "beautiful" people to the class.

## Chapter 5 – Me & Harvey Castro

**Synopsis:** Eddie begins by detailing the differences between himself and Harvey Castro who lives next door: Harvey is a senior, Eddie a junior; Harvey is from Nicaragua, Eddie born in the U.S. from Mexican parents; Harvey has a 4.5 GPA, Eddie barely passing. Harvey was supposed to be valedictorian but the school administrators decided at the last minute that his ESL classes didn't count, so he is now #2. Eddie said if that happened to him, he would have become violently angry, but Harvey just laughed. Eddie wonders why he and Harvey are so different when they have such similar backgrounds. Eddie explains how he came to be an alternative ed student—in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, he accidentally kicked a teacher in the crotch because she was twisting his ear. He wouldn't explain his actions or apologize, so he was placed in special ed, labeled as a sex offender and prescribed ADHD medication. Eddie believes that he was treated more harshly because he was a boy and because he is Mexican- American. Eddie says all the little things stick to him and weigh him down so he feels like his bones are made of stone.

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

How many kids do you know who are currently taking medications for ADD/ ADHD?

What is the value of being named valedictorian of your graduating class?

### **Reader Reactions:**

How would you have react to being demoted to the #2 position as Harvey Castro was?

There are many forms of prejudice in our society – against older people, for example.

What are some other forms of prejudice other than skin color or ethnic heritage?

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

Tell about a time you had an argument or fight with a teacher.

Describe a friend/relative who is very different from you. How are you different?

Tell about a time you experienced or observed prejudice of some kind.

### **Information, Please:**

How many children in the U.S. are currently prescribed medication for ADD and ADHD?

How does this compare to the number of children in other countries on the same medication?

### **Get It Together:**

Choose a country in South or Central America. Research the culture, clothing, customs, landscape, climate, music, and other information about this country. Create or find visual aids and objects (clothing, pictures, drawings, utensils, music, etc) that are unique to this country.

Prepare a short oral presentation for your classmates to share what you have learned.

## Chapter 6 – Walking with a Cop

**Synopsis:** In class, T.J. Ritchie mouths off about police killing innocent black men and he says regular black people should protest by using violence against the police. Other students shout their objections and McElroy calls Security to remove T.J. Watching T.J. walk out with the security officer reminds Eddie of the time when he was assigned to escort a police officer, Chris Cabrera, to Beecher's class. Eddie expected a male officer but Cabrera turned out to be a Puerto Rican woman. After learning that Eddie likes to read, Cabrera suggests that Eddie read *The Four Agreements* but he isn't interested. And he ignores her suggestions that he could graduate if he decided to make it happen. Eddie reveals that he is only staying in school because he promised his mother to graduate and set a good example for his younger siblings.

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

Why do many people act differently – even if they are innocent – around the police?  
How do the police in your neighborhood compare to the police in Eddie's neighborhood?

### **Reader Reactions:**

Why is it important for older students to set a good example for younger students?  
Is out-of-school suspension an effective way to change bad behavior? Why or why not?  
What do you think is the real reason that kids join gangs?

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

Describe somebody you consider a good role model. Why do you admire him/her?  
If you have ever been the only girl, the only boy, or the only person with your skin color or ethnic background in a group, describe the situation.  
Tell about an experience you have had – good or bad – involving a police officer.

### **Information, Please:**

What is the background of Don Miguel Ruiz, the author of *The Four Agreements*?  
Who were Huey Newton and Malcolm X?

### **Get It Together:**

Divide your class into four groups and assign one of the following tasks to each group:  
Find the name and address of the public information officer for your local police  
Write a letter to your local police, inviting an officer to come and visit your class.  
Prepare a list of good questions to ask your visiting officer.  
Write a thank you letter to your visitor and have all the students sign the letter.

## Chapter 7 – I Got a Girlfriend

### Synopsis:

Eddie signs up for ballroom dance to get fine arts credits and finds himself one of three boys among 17 girls. He almost quits but then he notices one girl standing alone and looking right at him. He is “struck down by love” as he imagines that the sun shines down through the basketball hoop and makes that girl “shine like an angel.” Lupe has transferred to the alternative school because of repeated attacks by another student at the regular high school. Lupe plans to go to college to become a doctor. Eddie is impressed. Primo warns Eddie that he is “too nice” to Lupe and she won’t respect him. For a change, Eddie ignores his cousin’s advice and argues with his pronouncements about women.

### Kick-Off Questions:

Who has taken a dance class? What was it like? (If nobody has taken dance, ask Who would take a dance class if it were offered at our school?)

What is the Heimlich maneuver? When do people use this technique?

### Reader Reactions:

Why do you think Lupe “picked” Eddie?

Do you agree with Primo that men “like the hunt better than the kill” when it comes to women? Why or why not?

### Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.

Tell about a time you were afraid to do something, but you did it anyway.

Tell about a time you didn’t do something you wanted to do because you were afraid. Would you do it today?

Tell about a time you or somebody you know needed emergency care or first aid.

### Information, Please:

Look up the Heimlich maneuver. Study the instructions. Gently practice with a partner.

### Get It Together:

Working in small groups or pairs, find some easy-to-follow instructions for doing a basic Waltz step and a basic ChaCha or Samba step. Print out the instructions if they are written, or find a DVD/VHS tape with instructions. Practice the moves until you can do the basic step to music. Optional: if students aren’t too shy, ask them to practice with a partner or with the teacher. If they are too shy, please don’t force them. Instead, ask them to videotape one of the popular dance shows on television and watch it in class.

## Chapter 8 - Girl + Friend

**Synopsis:** Eddie ponders the words “girlfriend” because in the past, his girlfriends were never friends. He didn’t really like them as people the way he likes Lupe. Primo doesn’t share Eddie’s high opinion of Lupe - Primo thinks she is bossy. And Lupe thinks Primo is unethical and lazy because he can’t keep a job and he can’t stand all the rules. That’s why Eddie doesn’t like school -- too many rules. But Lupe doesn’t care how many rules there are. She is focused on her goals.

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

Are most romantic couples really friends with each other?

Why do some people feel they need to talk all the time when they are with other people?

Is it better to be a talker or a listener? Why?

### **Reader Reactions:**

Eddie says that in New Mexico, people don’t need a lot of friends because they have so many relatives. Which would you rather have - a lot of friends or a lot of relatives? Why?

Eddie thinks boys have one-track minds, but girls don’t. What do you think?

Why do some people have so much trouble following rules?

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

Tell about a time you broke a rule and were punished. Was the rule fair or not?

After you graduate from high school, what kinds of friends would you like to have and what kind of activities would you like to share with your new friends?

Describe somebody you really respect and tell why you respect them.

### **Information, Please:**

Is it true that men think about sex every ten seconds? How could scientists judge such a thing?

### **Get It Together:**

Choose another country and research the kind of schools that country has. How are they different from your school? Which one do you think better prepares young people to be successful?

Prepare a short (3-5 minute) presentation to give to the class, describing your research and evaluation of the two different educational programs.

## Chapter 9 - Margaritas in Mexico

**Synopsis:** Primo convinces Eddie to skip school to drive to Palomas, Mexico where Primo needs to visit a dentist. Eddie insists that he wants to go straight to the dentist and back -- no visits to hookers. During the drive, Primo tells Eddie why he shot the guy so many years ago when Eddie was watching. The event traumatized Eddie and he never talked about. In Mexico, the boys pass by a penniless Indian woman with two tiny children. Primo explains that they have to give the woman money secretly so that the bums on the street won't rob her.

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

How do you feel about going to the dentist?

Should we give money to beggars or homeless people on the streets?

### **Reader Reactions:**

In what ways could we help the homeless and poor, aside from handing them money?

What is your opinion of Primo? Has your opinion changed since you started reading this book?

Should pregnant girls be allowed to attend regular classes? Why or why not?

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

What should we do about the problem of homelessness in this country?

Describe your last visit to a dentist's office. How did it smell and feel? What happened?

Do you believe it's a sin or a crime to kill somebody if they hurt or kill other people? Explain.

### **Information, Please:**

How many homeless people live in your town or city? How many live in your state?

### **Get It Together:**

Using the Internet, your school library, and interviews with professionals such as counselors, find out what is the best thing to do if you witness something terrible such as a bad accident or somebody's death. What happens when people keep something like that to themselves? How can you find somebody to talk to who will keep your thoughts and feelings confidential? How can writing in a journal help people cope with bad experiences?

## Chapter 10 – Lupe Full of Grace

### Synopsis:

T.J. Ritchie writes a poem and Lupe is impressed – so Eddie vows to write some poems, too. He can't think of a topic, so he looks in his literature book and finds instructions to look around at his world and write what he sees. He writes two poems about school and then he looks at Lupe and writes a beautiful poem titled "Lupe Full of Grace." He folds his poem into a tiny square and sticks it inside Lupe's shirt. She hits him in the head with her purse and calls him a *pachuco* but he doesn't care. He says, "I just smiled, thinking of my poem sitting so close to Lupe's heart."

### Kick-Off Questions:

Do you like poetry? Why or why not?

Are song lyrics poetry? Even rap lyrics? Heavy metal?

### Reader Reactions:

What do you think of Eddie's poems?

What makes such a difference between Eddie's first two poems and his third one?

### Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.

Write three poems – any style, any format

Look around your classroom and describe what you see.

Describe the most beautiful scenery, landscape or person you have ever seen.

### Information, Please:

Find a poem you like, or an inspirational quotation such as "If you can dream it, you can become it." Copy it down and explain why you like this particular piece of writing.

**Get It Together:** (This is the poetry project I used with *Dangerous Minds* students – there was no Dylan/Dylan contest)

Working in pairs or small groups, each student finds the lyrics to a favorite song that he/she thinks is a good example of poetry. Students print out the words. Teacher collects the lyrics and distributes copies to the class. Read the lyrics aloud, without music. Take a student vote and rate the lyrics only on a scale of 1 to 10 (or whatever you choose). Then, listen to the songs and take another vote for each song. Notice how the music changes some people's reactions. We each prefer certain musical rhythms and melodies. But often we can relate to words if we hear them alone.

**Note:** Teachers must set the standard before this exercise. I don't prohibit any swearing or mild sexual references, IF the students can explain why they admire the song lyrics as poetry. If students bring a song that is simply too vulgar, I explain that it makes me uncomfortable and ask them to bring something else. That way, they can laugh at my prudishness instead of feeling insulted or defensive.

## Chapter 11 – Secret Readers

**Synopsis:** Eddie recalls catching T.J. Ritchie reading a “real book” behind the bleachers once when they were both cutting class. Eddie says he has quit smoking. He goes to a bookstore to see if he can find any more books written by the author of the book T.J. was reading and ends up getting a book written by American Indian author Sherman Alexie. Eddie says this book makes him realize there are two kinds of books in the world – the boring kind they make you read in school and the kind they won’t let you read in school because then they would have to talk to you about real stuff such as life, sex, and religion. He has to write a 5-paragraph essay on politics for McElroy’s class and writes about how Anglos are so nervous about Mexicans taking over. He says they should be nervous because “payback is a bitch and we got a lot of payback coming.”

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

Why is immigration such an important issue in the U.S.?

Since our country was founded by immigrants from other countries, how can we justify saying now that immigrants are not welcome?

### **Reader Reactions:**

Why do so many kids, especially boys, pretend they aren’t as smart as they really are?

What do you think about Eddie’s comments on smoking?

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

What is your opinion of students listening to music while studying?

Should music be played over the loudspeakers in school? Why?

The U.S. is one of the few countries where students don’t have to learn foreign languages. Should students be required to learn another language? Why? If so, what language(s) should Americans learn?

### **Information, Please:**

When and why was the Berlin Wall built? When and why was it taken down?

### **Get It Together:**

Working as a class, design an experiment where you play different kinds of music – classical, pop, rock, heavy metal, rap, salsa, etc. while taking quizzes or doing difficult assignments. Chart your results – which music helps students earn better grades? Which music results in lower grades? How do students feel when different music is playing? **Note:** students should earn credit for doing the assignments and participating in the exercises, but should not be penalized in the teacher’s grade book for low grades, since this is an experiment.

## Chapter 12 - Garrulous Gabe and Silent Slim

**Synopsis:** Mr. McElroy shows up with new glasses, a new haircut and new clothes. And he teaches differently. He assigns individual projects. Lupe wants to do a dance demo but Eddie refuses. Eddie and Jaime decide to do a movie review because that will require the least speaking. The last presentation is by Lalo Pena, a chubby nerd. Lalo is a friend of Harvey Casto and the two of them have been taking kung fu classes. The other kids laugh at this idea, until they see Lalo's demo. He is really good. Eddie realizes that the reason Harvey and Lalo won't fight is that they don't need to fight to prove that they are tough. They have true self-confidence.

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

Why do so many kids make fun of kids who are really smart?

Will it matter after you graduate whether you were popular in school or not?

If you were a teacher, how would you handle class discussions.

### **Reader Reactions:**

What do you think happened to make such changes in Mr. McElroy?

Why do serious students of martial arts refuse to get involved in street fights?

What does Mr. McElroy mean by "research and regurgitate?"

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

Describe a time when you or somebody you know used their intelligence to solve a problem.

Describe a time when you were surprised to learn that somebody else had a special talent.

Why are martial arts, music, art and/or sports important? How do they help people in life?

If you could give yourself a total makeover, what would you do?

### **Information, Please:**

How many different kinds of intelligence are there? Which kind(s) do you think you have?

**Get It Together:** Using Mr. McElroy's plan, create your own individual or group projects and present them to the class. Assign three or four people to give Peer Critiques for each presentation. Focus on what was good about the project, *not* on negative criticism. Ask your teacher to present his/her own project, as well.

## Chapter 13 – Googling God

### Synopsis:

Eddie's class erupts into a discussion of homophobia and religion. Curtis Coleman, an intellectual from California, informs everybody that sloth and gluttony are sins, so they should be worried. Henry Dominguez stops the argument by shouting "shut up!" and then everybody remembers that Henry's gay cousin killed himself after his parents told him they wished he had never been born. Eddie recalls a local preacher who hosted a holy book burning which really upset him. He says that preacher should act more like Jesus, doing good works without asking for reward, adopting an ugly orphan child, and loving homosexual kids even if they are against his religion. He asks Lupe if she believes in God and she says she is researching the existence of God – she Googled him on the Internet. Eddie is waiting for the results of Lupe's research before deciding what to believe.

### Kick-Off Questions:

This chapter contains some words that may be unfamiliar. What does *Gluttony* mean? *Blasphemous*? *Homophobic*? *Sloth*?

How can learning about other people's religious beliefs help us get along better?

### Reader Reactions:

What do you think of Lupe's statement: "People who are afraid of ideas are dumb people who don't know how to think for themselves."?

Some schools now offer classes in world religions. Is this a good idea? Why?

### Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.

Explain why we should or shouldn't allow people to pray in school.

Tell about a time there was a loud argument in one of your classes.

Create three rules that everybody in the world has to follow. Why these rules?

### Information, Please:

What was Hitler's religion? John F. Kennedy's? Martin Luther King's? Ghandi's? Geronimo's?

### Get It Together:

Working in small groups, look up Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism on the Internet or in your school library. What are the basic beliefs and practices of each religion? In what ways are they different? In what ways are they similar?

## MID-BOOK REVIEW

Provide the following options and let students select two assignments (from different categories). Please do not force students to speak in front of the class if they are shy. Forced public speaking does not help people overcome their fear – it makes it worse.

### WRITING

**Essay:** Select one of your journal entries from Chapters 1-7 and use it as the basis of a formal essay about the book. Now is the time to revise writing style, check that spelling and grammar, look at their sentence structure, paragraph development, introductions and conclusions.

**Book Review:** Write a review of the book – *not* a synopsis of the book that tells what happened. Instead, choose one or more aspects of the book that you either liked or didn't like and explain why. For examples of book reviews, look in magazines or online at web sites that sell books such as Amazon.com or Barnes and Noble.

### SPEAKING

**Movie Review:** Working with a partner, do an “Ebert and Ropert-style” review of the book, as though it were a movie. State your opinions about the characters, plot, etc. and give the story a rating such as Thumbs Up/Down or 1-Star/10-Stars.

**Monologue:** Memorize a few paragraphs from the book that you really like and present your speech to the class as though you were auditioning for a part in a play or movie.

### ART

**Book Cover:** Design and create a full-color book cover that is different from the one on the book. Create your own comments and recommendations from readers. You can use clip-art from the Internet or find art in magazines. Consider painting a picture to use for the cover art.

**Character Portrait:** Draw or paint portraits of at least two of the characters from the book. Use charcoal, pastels, crayons, pencil, chalk, pen and ink, watercolor or oil paints.

## Chapter14 - Stick to the Dead Dog

**Synopsis:** Eddie recalls an article they read in Mr. McElroy's class about how to argue successfully. They discussed techniques for arguing without fighting. Eddie recalls the article when he and Lupe have a serious argument about time. He is always late and she threatens to break up with him. Finally, they agree that from now on they will choose a specific time to do things instead of saying "in a little while." Eddie believes this is the kind of thing kids should be learning in school, things that will be helpful in life. He doesn't think all the tests are helping. T.J. Ritchie says tests are like dog doo. They stink.

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

How is an argument different from a fight?

What would you do if you had a boyfriend or girlfriend who was always late?

Why do we need to take tests in school? If we didn't have tests, how would we know what students have learned?

### **Reader Reactions:**

What does Eddie mean by "stick to the dead dog?"

How do you think Eddie and his father handle arguments?

Do you think men and women have a different concept of time, as Eddie and Lupe do?

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

Tell about a time you and somebody else had a big argument. What techniques did you use?

What do you think people really need to learn in school in order to be successful later?

Tell about a time you took a test and did better or worse than you expected.

### **Information, Please:**

Look up the GED or the SAT exams online. Take a practice test, if one is available, and see how well you do. Do you think you could pass one of those exams right now? If not, what would you need to study in order to be prepared?

### **Get It Together:**

Research how to argue effectively. List the rules or steps people should follow to avoid letting an argument turn into a fight.

## Chapter 15 - Who is Eddie Corazon?

### Synopsis:

Eddie lies to his father and borrows his car to take Jaime and his girlfriend Lena to Planned Parenthood because Jaime bought some birth control pills from T.J. that turned out to be baby aspirins. On the way back, they get into an accident with an Anglo man driving an SUV. The police officer who arrives on the scene is Sgt. Cabrera. Eddie hopes she won't remember him, but the first thing she says is, "How did you like that book?" Mr. Garcia arrives next, and he asks Eddie to take a little walk with him. He tells Eddie that Lupe is so smart she deserves a man she can respect, a man Mr. Garcia can respect. Then he says Lupe can't see Eddie any more. Eddie's father arrives on Eddie's bicycle. Eddie's father decides to send Eddie over to Truth or Consequences to stay with his Tio (Uncle) Antonio who says he will "whip Eddie's *nalgas* into shape." Eddie has visited T or C before and he recalls visiting The Black Cat book store where the resident cat nibbled his shoelaces while he was browsing.

### Kick-Off Questions:

Is it ever okay to tell a lie? If so, when?

Why do parents and teachers get so upset when you lie to them?

### Reader Reactions:

Why didn't Eddie's father yell at him when he arrived at the accident scene?

Some people think sex ed classes will encourage kids to be sexually active. What do you think?

### Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.

Tell about a time you lied and got caught – or go away with it.

Write your parents or guardians a letter and tell them what a good or bad job they are doing. (You can tear this up after you write it, so nobody will see it.)

Tell about a time a friend talked you into doing something you knew you shouldn't do.

### Information, Please:

Where is Truth or Consequences, New Mexico? How did the town get such a strange name?

### Get It Together:

Working in teams of four, look up book reviews of *The Four Agreements* on the Internet or at the library. What do people think about this book? What are the Four Agreements? What do they mean? Rewrite them in your own words. Compare your versions with the versions that the other teams in your class create.

## Chapter 16 - Making Babies

**Synopsis:** While he and Jaime are waiting outside Planned Parenthood, Eddie thinks about babies and how maybe it would be better if people had babies the way cactus do. He realizes his idea has some flaws, but he thinks he could work it out if he used the plan that Beecher showed them for problem solving. He describes the problem-solving exercises they did in school. He can't think of a way out of the situation he is currently in, though, because he doesn't know how to win over Lupe's father who has never liked Eddie very much.

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

What would you do if your girlfriend's or boyfriend's parents disliked you?

What do you do to handle the big problems in your life?

What would you do if your favorite teacher or an adult relative had bad breath and you really thought they should know about it? How could you tell the person without offending him or her?

### **Reader Reactions:**

What do you think of Eddie's idea that each person should make a new person when they die?

How do you feel about group work in school?

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

How could teachers set up group-work activities so that you would enjoy them and learn more?

How would you solve the problem if you had a teacher who hated you?

What would you do if you wanted to regain somebody's respect after you lose it?

### **Information, Please:**

Find a problem-solving technique online or in a book. Copy down the steps. Think about how you could apply those steps to a problem in your own life.

### **Get It Together:**

As a class, come up with some real problems that students in your class face. Then, working in small groups, assign each group a problem. Take 20-30 minutes to brainstorm solutions and choose a plan for solving the problem. Choose one person from your group to present your solution to the class. Ask the class to evaluate your solution and make suggestions for improving your plan.

## Chapter 17 - The Four Agreements

### Synopsis:

Eddie decides to try being an intellectual when he goes to T or C. He is glad that his cousins aren't a real gang because he would get hurt if he quit hanging with them. He thinks gang members need more love from their peers, not their parents. Eddie finally reads *The Four Agreements* and "the light turns on in his brain." He finally understands the agreements: Always Do Your Best. Don't Take Anything Personally. Make No Assumptions. Be Impeccable With Your Word. A Mexican professor visits their class and Eddie decides maybe he will try to go to college with Lupe. He decides to ask Beecher for a recommendation. He is going to give Miss Beecher his journal which contains a humor essay about Saddam Hussein along with the other writings that he never showed Miss Beecher.

### Kick-Off Questions:

How can somebody still go to college or trade/tech school if they have bad grades in high school?

How does the way you think affect your life?

### Reader Reactions:

What do you think of Eddie's essay about Saddam?

If you were a teacher, what grade would you give him on that essay?

### Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.

What do you think the U.S. President would be like if he were a student in this class?

Tell about a time you assume something was true, but it turned out not to be true.

Describe somebody who has been a good or bad influence on you and why.

### Information, Please:

What do people have to do to earn a GED in your state? How long does it take? How much does it cost?

### Get It Together:

Working in teams, create Four Agreements for School – things that would improve your school if everybody actually followed them. Create a poster and present your agreements to the class.

After all the teams have presented their agreements, display all the posters in your classroom.

Consider having the entire class vote for their favorite four and create a poster to be displayed in your school hallways.

## Chapter 18 - Plan C: Alka-Seltzer in Your Pocket

**Synopsis:** Eddie implements his plan of becoming an intellectual at his new school in T or C. It turns out to be easier than expected. Nobody bothers him except one tough kid named Francisco who confronts Eddie after school. Eddie has three plans - 1) think like an intellectual who doesn't fight, 2) wear fake glasses in the hopes that nobody will punch him, 3) carry an Akla-Seltzer in his pocket to put into his mouth in the event of a fight (the foam is supposed to deter the other person). Eddie slips the tablet into his mouth and chokes on it. Eventually, it starts foaming and Francisco is too surprised to do anything but stare at Eddie.

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

Why do we care so much about what other people think of us, especially people we don't know?

Why are some kids so mean to new kids who transfer into a school?

How could you get off to a good start at a new school?

### **Reader Reactions:**

What do you think of Eddie's three plans for avoiding fights?

Should high school students be allowed to watch R-rated movies in school? Why or why not?

How would you feel if suddenly you had to change schools next week?

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

Tell about a time you were the new kid in school - what was the experience like?

Tell about a time somebody new came to your school and other kids teased him/her.

Describe one of the best movies you ever saw - explain why you thought it was a good movie.

Tell about a time you or somebody you know was the target of a bully attack. What happened?

### **Information, Please:**

Find out why psychologists and other experts believe that some people become bullies. Do you agree with them? If not, why do you think some people choose to become bullies and others don't?

### **Get It Together:**

Working as a class or in small groups, brainstorm ways to cope with bullies at your school. How could you help kids who are bullied? How could you prevent bullying? What should be done with bullies who really torment other kids?

## Chapter 19 –Living in T or C

### Synopsis:

Eddie's plan works – he sits with the smart kids at school in T or C, mostly girls. He and Lupe write each other a letter every day and mail them once a week. Tio isn't a normal bachelor, in Eddie opinion. He doesn't drink beer or eat cheeseburgers – he eats brown rice and stir-fried vegetables and drinks herbal tea. He watches PBS and won't let Eddie watch commercial TV or use the computer for emails. He makes Eddie work outside doing manual labor at the park where Tio is a resident park ranger. Eddie walks the banks of the Rio Grande, watching the blue herons and ducks, thinking and writing poetry to Lupe. Tio takes him to a bath house at the natural hot springs and to a poetry reading at the Black Cat. Eddie doesn't read, but listens to the others. He is surprised when a woman from North Carolina reads a story and he relates so strongly that he could have written her story himself.

### Kick-Off Questions:

Would you rather live out in the country or in a city or town? Why?

Why do so many students tease and torment the students who get good grades?

### Reader Reactions:

Do you think Eddie will be able to maintain his new, improved attitude? Why?

Would you enjoy living with Tio Antonio? Why?

### Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.

Tell about a time you visited the country or went to a big city.

If you could design The Perfect Day, where would you go and what would you do?

Tell about a time something happened that changed your life.

### Information, Please:

What is adobe and how is it made? Who was Pancho Villa?

### Get It Together:

Plan a poetry reading or slam for your class. For slam rules, look online for examples. Ask volunteers to sign up to read poetry they wrote themselves, or poetry by other authors that they really like. (Try looking up the poetry of Shel Silverstein.) Be sure to set some ground rules for how long people should read, how the audience should behave, etc. (Remember, it isn't easy to get up in front of your peers. So don't hurt people's feelings. There's no reason to do that. It doesn't make you look bigger if you try to make somebody else feel smaller.) If your class enjoys this project, consider inviting another class of students to attend your next reading.

## Chapter 20 – The Black Cat

**Synopsis:** Eddie goes to another reading at the Black Cat – he's not nervous anymore because the owner of the store gave him a free cup of coffee one day. But he's still too shy to read his poetry. Ramona reads another good story. Then Tio takes Eddie to visit his family. His parents look older to him. Mr. Garcia lets him take Lupe out for a frozen custard and she tells him that Primo Enrique has been busted for stealing car stereos. While in Rosablanca, Eddie takes his journal to the library and gives it to Miss Beecher who says she would be delighted to write him a recommendation. On the way back to T or C, Tio tells Eddie not to be in a rush to have sex and that he was once in love with Eddie's mother who was a "hot babe" and "sharp as a razor blade." Tio wonders how far Eddie's mother could have flown if she had not gotten married and had kids. Eddie decides not to ask Lupe to marry him until she has a chance to fly.

### Kick-Off Questions:

What do you think your parents or guardians were like when they were in high school?

Why do we forget so much of the information we study, but remember so well the personal things that teachers say to us?

### Reader Reactions:

What does Lupe mean when she says she can hear Eddie's heart beating at night when she puts her head on her pillow?

Why do Eddie's parents all of a sudden look much older to him when he visits?

What does Eddie mean when he says, "...who knows, I might do a little flying myself...?"

### Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.

Tell about a time when a close friend or relative got in trouble and you wished you could help.

What are the three most important lessons you have learned about life or love?

What's on your mind today?

### Information, Please:

What does "*Ay te watcho*" mean? What are *nalgas*? What does "*hasta luego*" mean?

### Get It Together:

Working in pairs or teams, choose an area of study, such as web page design, art, science, cosmetology, nursing, auto mechanics, photography, floral arrangement, sports promotion, plumbing, dance instructor, big rig driver, teacher, video game designer, etc.

Where would you go to get training in this field? Would you need a license, a certificate or a college degree? How many classes would you have to take or how many hours would you have to train on-the-job? What subjects or skills would you study when you first started? How long would it take you to finish your education or training?

## Chapter 21 - Man to Man

**Synopsis:** Eddie explains that every once in a while, his father tries to have a man-to-man talk, but they both believe it's Eddie's mother's idea. Eddie thinks he and his father are too different to really understand each other. When Eddie visited his parents during the time he was living with Tio, Eddie's father tried to have a real talk about sex, but Eddie told him that Enrique already gave him all the details. Papi said that Enrique probably knows more about women, and Eddie laughs, but later on, he reconsiders. His mother really loves his father, so Eddie thinks that perhaps Papi knows something about women after all. Enrique says that all girls are jealous, although Eddie says Lupe isn't. Eddie decides to test her - Lupe tells him that if he cheated on her, he would be too stupid to have for a boyfriend. Eddie realizes that if Enrique was as smart as he thinks he is, he wouldn't be in jail on his third strike.

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

Has an adult ever given you the "birds-and-bees" story? Were the nervous? How did you react?

What kinds of things do your parents nag you about? Are they right or wrong to nag you?

Why do teenagers have so many arguments with their parents?

### **Reader Reactions:**

What do you think of Enrique's explanation about how to get a girl interested?

How does your relationship with your parents/guardians compare to Eddie's relationship with his parents?

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

If you could give Eddie some advice about his relationship with Lupe, what would you tell him?

What kind of relationship do you have with your parent(s) or guardian(s)? What could you do to improve that relationship?

Describe your parent(s) or guardian(s) as you think they would have been when they were in high school? How do you think they acted? How did they dress? Were they good students?

### **Information, Please:**

Ask your parent(s) or guardian(s) (or some other adult that you know well) what they dreamed of doing after high school. Did their dreams come true? If not, why not?

### **Get It Together:**

Working in small groups, take turns role-playing as parents/guardians and teens who come home with bad report cards, two hours later for curfew, and with a boyfriend/girlfriend that the parents/guardians don't like. First, try to create realistic conversations. Then see if you can improve the conversations so that some real communication takes place, instead of shouting, pouting and punishments.

## Chapter 22 - Sunglasses for Books

**Synopsis:** Eddie visits Primo in jail, even though he doesn't like going there. Primo doesn't look so cool and Eddie feels badly. Eddie had sent Primo a book, but it was returned because books have to be sent directly from publishers to prisoners. Primo tells Eddie not to bother because he hates reading. Eddie reads between the lines and realizes that Primo can't read. He says reading gives him a headache which reminds Eddie that Jaime said the same thing in school and Beecher gave him a transparency to put over the page to make it easier to read. Eddie decides he will find a transparency and send it to Primo -- or ask Beecher to send it, along with some books for Primo. Eddie hopes Primo may learn to read if nobody is watching.

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

Do you know any adults who graduated from high school but still can't read very well?

How do you feel about reading? Why?

Why are people so ashamed of being poor readers?

### **Reader Reactions:**

What do you think is going to happen to Primo?

What kind of person is Primo? What has he said or done to create your opinion of him?

How do you think Eddie's opinion of Primo has changed since the beginning of the book?

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

Describe your own experience when you were learning to read. Was it good or bad? Why?

Describe the best/worst book or story you ever read. What did you like/hate about it?

If somebody wrote a book about you, what kind of book would you want to be in? What would you want to happen to you in that book? What kind of character would you be?

### **Information, Please:**

Visit [nrsl.com](http://nrsl.com) or [irlen.com](http://irlen.com) on the Internet. What is light sensitivity? What are the symptoms?

How many people have it? Based on the description, do you think you are sensitive to light?

### **Get It Together:**

Working in small groups, collect money and assign somebody to buy some clear plastic transparencies from an office supply store or department store (you can buy a package of 4-5 for less than \$3). Experiment by placing the transparencies over the page of your textbook. Is it easier to read with or without the plastic? Which colors make reading seem the easiest? Share the results of your experiment with your teacher or with the class, if time permits.

## Chapter 23 - Lupe's Heart

**Synopsis:** Lupe's mother was killed by a drunk driver who already had six DUI's on his record. Eddie thinks about the chain of events that leads up to any important event in life...Lupe's mother getting killed, Lupe transferring to Bright Horizons, the teacher twisting Eddie's ear, Eddie signing up for ballroom dance, etc. Eddie has been trying to find the answer to life's questions in books, but the books just lead to more questions. He doesn't understand why life happens the way it does. Lupe tells him about a dream she had. After the dream, she felt better about her mother's death. But Eddie thinks that he would be willing to give up everything, including Lupe, if it would bring her mother back.

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

What should happen to people who have multiple DUI's?

Is life just a series of accidents, or do you think there's some kind of master plan?

What could you do to help a classmate whose parent has just been killed?

### **Reader Reactions:**

Why does her strange dream make Lupe feel better about her mother's death?

Why can't Eddie discuss his deepest thoughts with his parents?

How could Lupe forgive the man who killed her mother?

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

Think of something important that has happened in your life. Describe the chain of events, the decisions you made and actions you took that led to this event happening.

Tell about a time when you changed your attitude about something and it changed your life.

Tell about a time you forgave somebody for doing something -- or a time somebody forgave you for doing something you shouldn't have.

### **Information, Please:**

Look up "forgiveness" on the Internet or in the library and find out why so many mental health experts believe it's important. Think of people in your life that you need to forgive (you don't have to write this part down or share it with anybody - it's just for your to think about).

### **Get It Together:**

As a class, brainstorm different strategies that you could use to forgive people who have hurt you in the past. Next, brainstorm simple things anybody could do to bring more happiness into his/her life.

## Chapter 24 - To Whom It May Concern

**Synopsis:** Beecher sends Eddie's letter of recommendation to his house, address to Eduardo Corazon, unaware that Eddie and his father have the same last name. Previously, Eddie didn't want to be called Junior and he didn't want to share Papi's name. Now he wouldn't mind, but he doesn't know how Papi feels about the issue. The letter is very good, but Eddie doesn't think *To Whom It May Concern* sound very good. His mother explains that the letter is to everybody. Eddie is then proud that Beecher would say good things about him to the whole world. But he also realizes that now he has an obligation not to let her down.

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

Why do employers ask for letters of reference when people apply for jobs?

Who would you ask if you needed a letter of reference?

What do you think Beecher will say in her letter about Eddie?

### **Reader Reactions:**

What would Miss Beecher have said about T.J. Ritchie if he asked for a letter?

Was Beecher's letter surprising to you, or did she say what you expected about Eddie?

Why does Eddie feel pressure to live up to Beecher's recommendation?

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

Write a letter of recommendation for yourself. Then write another letter for a friend.

Write a letter of recommendation for one of your parent(s)/guardian(s) or teachers.

Tell about a time you went for a job interview. Were you nervous? What happened? Did you get the job? What did you learn from that experience that might help you in the future.

### **Information, Please:**

Research tips for making a good impression on a job interview. Consider what you would wear and jot down short answers that you could use for the most commonly asked questions (What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? Why do you want this job? What are your long-term job goals? Why should I hire you?)

### **Get It Together:**

Invite local business people, parents or teachers to come to your classroom to conduct mock job interviews. Students prepare resumes, practice interviewing each other, prepare answers to common interview questions, and choose clothes to wear for their interviews (Note: you don't have to wear a suit, if you don't have one. But it is important to be neat and clean.) Students should prepare a short feedback form for interviewers to complete. On the day of the mock interviews, ask the interviewers to fill in the forms. Be sure to write thank-you letters to the adults who participate in this exercise.

## Chapter 25 - C.A.N.T.

**Synopsis:** Tio drops Eddie off at the Black Cat bookstore for the reading. While he's waiting outside, T.J. shows up and tries to egg Eddie into a fight. Eddie won't fight. T.J. says Lupe is unfaithful to Eddie. For a second, Eddie wonders if T.J. is telling the truth, but he quickly realizes that T.J. is just trying to get to him. He refuses to fight and T.J. pulls a knife. Eddie is scared, but he doesn't back down. He looks T.J. straight in the eye and tells him to stop being a loser and stop dealing drugs and get a job and use his brains. T.J. insists that he can't do those things. Eddie realizes that T.J. is holding himself back; he can't be successful because he doesn't believe in himself. T.J. knocks Eddie out and leaves. Eddie doesn't tell anybody who hit him.

### **Kick-Off Questions:**

Could T.J. Ritchie change his life and start succeeding the way Eddie did?

Why do some people seem destined to fail at everything?

Why do people like having their fortunes told?

### **Reader Reactions:**

What would you have done if T.J. pulled the knife on you?

Why did T.J. tell Eddie that Lupe was unfaithful?

If you had to be Eddie, T.J. or Lupe, which person would you be and why?

### **Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.**

Who is a stronger person - Eddie or T.J.? Give examples from the book to support your opinion.

What makes a person really successful? Describe a successful person that you know.

Tell about a time that you succeeded in doing something difficult. How did you feel?

### **Information, Please:**

Read a book, or some magazine articles or online articles that offer tips for success. Make a list of tips that you think offer good advice.

### **Get It Together:**

Arrange another poetry slam (see Get It Together, Chapter 19), if your class enjoyed that project. Or, if the majority don't want to do a slam, then work in small groups to come up with strategies for getting over the fear of public speaking. (Fear of public speaking is the #1 fear among people - fear of death is #2!). Design a class project that will allow people to speak in front of small groups (3-4 people) or the entire class, without feeling like they are going to faint or die. Telling jokes can be a non-threatening activity (keep them clean). Be sure to make a rule that nobody can harass or embarrass the speaker -- inside or outside of the classroom (it's just *not* cool).

Everybody who speaks earns an A on this exercise. The point is to have the courage to speak publicly, not to be perfect.

## Chapter 26 - Veinte/Veinte Vision

### Synopsis:

Eddie gets ready to go back home. He worries that he'll go back to being a loser. Ramona invited him to join her writer's group. He wishes he could stay in T or C, but he misses Lupe, Jaime and his family. He will miss walking by the river and going to the Black Cat, but he plans to continue writing poetry. Tio gives him a journal as a going-away present, and Eddie writes a new poem. He takes it to the Black Cat for the last reading he will attend, but he chickens out and doesn't sign up to read. Ramona secretly signs him up and they announce him as a reader. The audience loves his poem and he can still hear the applause ringing in his ears as the story ends.

### Kick-Off Questions:

Why do some people enjoy having a reputation as *tough* or *bad*?

Why do some people really hate to read out loud in front of other people?

How would you feel about standing up in front of strangers and reading a poem you wrote?

### Reader Reactions:

What does Eddie mean by, "I get a feeling like I am the river, El Rio Eduardo...?"

What do you think of Eddie's poem? What does it mean? Why did he write it?

Eddie could have escaped if he wanted to. Why did he stay and read his poem?

### Ready, Set, Write: Choose one topic from the list.

Tell about a time you had to move and leave your friends.

Describe the best friend you ever had – or describe a best friend you'd like to have.

Write a letter to Eddie and tell him what you think of his story and his poetry.

### Information, Please:

How many credits do you need to graduate from your high school? How many credits do you have now? Ask a teacher or counselor to show you your transcript.

What are some ways you can make up missing credits, if you need to?

### Get It Together:

The entire class chooses three consecutive days to go without watching TV. (If the class can handle it, try to go without cell phones or Internet, as well). Make brief journal notes to answer the following questions: Were you able to do it? If not, why not? How did it feel? What did you do instead of watching TV? Would you be able to do this for a month? How would it change your life?

## END-OF-BOOK QUESTIONS

For class discussion, small group discussion, or individual assignments.

In what ways has Eddie changed as a person and as a student throughout this book?

Choose one main character from the book and describe their appearance, personality and attitude towards life. Use specific examples from the story in your description.

What do you think will happen to Lupe and Eddie? Will they stay together? Do you think they *should* stay together? Why?

T.J. Ritchie is not a model student, but even his bad behavior can have a positive influence on other people. He makes people think about things, for example. Describe an incident where T.J.'s behavior prompted other people to think or act differently.

Give an example of an incident in this book that foreshadows (*gives hints about*) a later incident or behavior. Be sure to describe both events and how they are related.

Eddie describes Mr. Garcia as having “eyes like a bullfighter,” and a kiss from Lupe as being “as soft as a feather.” What poetic technique is Eddie using in these examples? Write your own examples using this technique to describe Eddie and T.J.

Which element is more important in this book - the characters or the plot? Explain your answer.

Is Eddie a good poet, in your opinion? Why? Give specific examples to support your opinion.

Why do you think the author wrote this book? What was she trying to accomplish?

Which adult in this book do you think sets the best example for young people? Why? Give examples of things this person says or does.

Which of The Four Agreements would make the most difference in your life, if you really followed it? Why?

Why do Americans find it so difficult to stop watching television?

# FINAL ASSIGNMENTS

Allow students to select two assignments from two different categories, so they can choose the areas where they feel most confident. If they feel comfortable in your classroom, you might encourage them to choose areas where they feel least confident – so they can tackle a new challenge and learn new skills.

(*Please* encourage but do not force students to speak in front of the class if they are shy. Forced public speaking does not help people overcome their fear – it makes the fear worse. And there's really nothing wrong with being shy. We can't all be extroverts.)

## WRITING

**Essay:** Select one of your journal entries from Chapters 8-15 and use it as the basis of a formal essay about the book. Now is the time to revise the writing style, check spelling and grammar, look at sentence structure, paragraph development, introductions and conclusions.

**New Chapter:** Write the next chapter of the book, as you think Eddie would have written it. Minimum length – 3 page (typed & double-spaced or very neatly and legibly handwritten).

**Thesis:** Compare/contrast *Muchacho* to another book about teenagers.

## SPEAKING

**Act it Out:** Working with one or two classmates, write a short skit for two or three characters from the book. Act out your skit for the class.

**Make it Up:** Write a short monologue (2-3 minutes) narrated by T.J. Ritchie or Lupe. Memorize your monologue and present it to the class.

## ART

**Movie Poster:** Design and create a full-color poster for a movie based on *Muchacho*

**Create a Scene:** Draw or paint a scene from the book, such as Lupe and Eddie dancing, Eddie watching the blue heron, or T.J. Ritchie walking with the security guard.