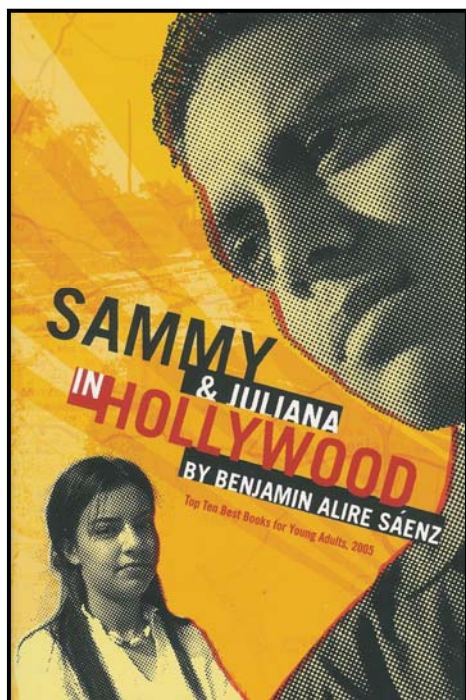




Teacher's Guide to SAMMY & JULIANA IN HOLLYWOOD

by Benjamin Alire Sáenz



AWARDS

- Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults, YALSA, 2005
- Americas Award
- Finalist, L.A. Times Book Prize
- JHunt Award for Young Adult Literature
- Texas TAYSHAS List
- Capitol Choices

THEMES

- Contemporary Literature: Mexican-American Experience
- Fiction: Death/grief
- Barrio violence and poverty
- Tolerance (Racial, Sexual, Socioeconomic)
- History (Late 1960's, Pop culture, Vietnam War)
- Life in High School
- Adolescence: Coming-of-age

CRITIC'S PRAISE

Horn Book, Spring 2005

Written in a poetic first-person voice that incorporates some Spanish into the narrative, Sammy's story of love, loss, and strong family ties is hard to forget.

School Library Journal, September 2005

Grade 9 Up: Sammy Santos—responsible, bright, and self-contained—grows up in the Hollywood barrio of Las Cruces, NM, during the last half of the 1960s. Sáenz provides the Mexican-American teen with a voice that is genuine and compelling, realistic in its limitations and nuances as he comes to grips with the death of Juliana, his first love, and the increasingly complex demands and needs of his remaining friends, as well as of his family and neighbors. Sáenz works through all this material neatly and so effectively that Sammy deserves to become a character of lasting interest to both casual readers and literature classes. This is a powerful and authentic look at a community's aspirations and the tragic losses that result from shattered dreams.



VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates), December 2004

That this surprisingly mature young man handles the many hardships and heartaches that fate throws his way makes for absorbing and uplifting reading. Saenz, a fine storyteller, has made sure that the language, characters, and circumstances ring true, and although the Chicano and English street slangs are often crude and the Spanish terms are seldom translated, Sammy's intrinsic goodness, loyalty, and generosity of spirit make it an illuminating and edifying story. Older teens will find it an emotional, literary roller coaster. Young adult librarians should certainly consider this purchase, especially if there is a large bilingual readership.

BOOK SUMMARY

Sammy Santos, an introverted and introspective Mexican-American teen, lives with his father and kid sister in the Hollywood barrio of Las Cruces, New Mexico in the late 1960's. Hard-working and studious, Sammy faces barrio violence and experiences school racism from both peers and an authoritarian administration. Outside of school, he holds part time jobs and cooks and cares for his younger sister while his father works long hours.

The summer before his senior year, he falls in love with Juliana. She's a tough girl with a dark home life. She gets murdered by her father right before school begins. Sammy's grief is compounded for the first time ever since his mother died of cancer, and will compound as a central theme throughout the story through successive losses of close friends subject to the issues of their times: one is drafted and dies in the Vietnam war; another one dies from a heroin overdose; and a third one and his gay partner are badly beaten by a gringo gang and banned from the community. Despite the times and circumstance, Sammy maintains his loyalty to self and to those who matter to him.


TEACHING OVERVIEW

This book offers an opportunity for rich theme-based discussions. In particular, the story provides a context for student realization of self. It also serves as an effective tool for language analysis of dialogue and non-translated but stylistic use of Spanish. The story allows students to learn from Sammy as he experiences some of life's difficult transitions which include: first love, friends moving, high school graduation, heartbreak, personal sense of loss, issues of alienation, and the death of both family and friends.

LESSON PLAN ACCOUNTABILITY

This teacher's guide contains comprehension strategies with literature-based questions and discussion activities. Divided into Before, During, and After Reading sections, all activities and questions provide coverage of generalized high school Language Arts content standards in the skill areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening and visual literacy. Learner objective goals include: critical thinking, discussion skills, self-awareness, and heightened understanding of human motives and conflicts.

For teacher convenience and assessment purposes, this guide offers a resource section called Curriculum Coverage and Internet Extensions. Specific skills and standards utilized throughout the guide are listed for addressing lesson plans and learner accountability. The Internet links



cited provide extension activities on the topics of tolerance and diversity.

COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

BEFORE READING

Explore the theme of tolerance. Sample topics might include: Embracing diversity, Gay and Lesbian issues, general stereotypes, human rights, language and power, Mexican-Americans, nontraditional families, racism, sexism, and violence/conflict resolution.

Write the word “poverty” on the board. Have students share the images that surface in their mind. Discuss root causes of poverty and potential solutions. Explore poverty in terms of present-day and future-oriented concerns.

Find out what students know about life and issues of the late 1960’s. List their observations as a visual on a piece of poster or easel paper and keep visible throughout the study of the story.

Talk about death and grief, and the issues of loss and separation. Have students reflect on death in general, and share if comfortable, on recent close deaths in particular. Explore death both as an emotion and the concept of death as a companion. Examine different types of death (i.e. unexpected, accidents, murder, illness or disease, war, drugs, etc.). Brainstorm with students ways to ease the grief of a loved one (i.e. resurrecting pleasant memories, sharing stories or mementos, talking about the person, writing letters or poems, making a scrapbook, wearing something like a hat or ring or piece of clothing, etc.).

Invite students to study the cover of the book. Make predictions about the story using the cover art with its map backdrop, inside flaps and back cover writing, and the title. Have students discuss cross-cultural themes and connections generated by the front and back cover (i.e. names used for characters, attitude toward death, place names, etc.).

AS READING PROGRESSES


Assign reading times into five separate sessions in accord with the book’s five part layout and format:

- Part 1, The Way She Looked at Me
- Part 2, Pifas and Gigi and the Politics of Hollywood
- Part 3, Another Name for Exile
- Part 4, The Citizens of Hollywood Rise Up Against the System
- Part 5, Welcome to Hollywood.

Encourage students to be engaged thinkers and to identify main ideas, make predictions and inferences, and draw conclusions while they read.

Have students observe stylistic use of Spanish vocabulary words and phrases. Ask students to pay attention to their own comprehension skills when reading in Spanish. If there are places where they do not understand, ask them to follow these three steps: first, glean meaning from context clues; second, translate in own words as appropriate; and third, use a dictionary or ask someone for the meaning when necessary.

Ask students to notice details and references in the book that pertain to the 1960’s time period while they read. Encourage them to take notes and observe page numbers of specific



examples. Inform them they will be expected to locate, document and categorize their findings as a follow-up assignment.


Have students write a journal entry after finishing each assigned reading session. Instruct students to notice what they feel while they read, and reflect about why they feel the way they do. Those who have difficulty finding things to write about can incorporate the discussion questions as a basis for their entry. Pose your own or the following questions to students. The questions can serve as prompts for in-class group discussions and/or as take-home written assignments.

Session I: Assign Part 1 (pg. 3-51)

1. Read Sammy's quote on the very first page. What do you think he means when he says, "The first thing the dead do is lose their voices?"
2. Part 1 is titled, "The Way She Looked at Me." Think of a time when someone looked at you a certain way that affected you deep down and describe the kind of look and what you felt. How can a look which doesn't physically touch you on the skin trigger a physiological reaction or emotional sensation? Explain your response.
3. Sammy notices that when his mother is the subject of conversation, that his dad can look both happy and sad at the same time. What kinds of situations cause you to feel opposite emotions at the same time? Be specific and describe how this can be so.
4. Cigarette smoking occurs throughout the story. When did Sammy first fall in love with the smell of tobacco and why do you think he started to smoke? Aside from whether you think smoking is good or bad, and outside of its addictive characteristic, why do you think smoking is a hard habit for many to break?
5. How do the scenarios concerning Mrs. Lopez, Mr. Birdwail, and Pico provide glimpses into Juliana's personality? What do they reveal about her essence and nature? Be specific and substantiate your response.
6. List several examples why Sammy hates Mrs. Apodaca at first. What does he observe and learn about her that changes his mind thereafter?
7. What job did Sammy quit and why? What new job did he get instead? Who is Pifas and how does he show his friendship for Sammy?
8. What did Juliana's father do? How did the neighborhood react? What did Sammy do after learning the news? If you were Sammy, where would you have gone or what would you have done?

Session II: Assign Part 2 (pg. 53-112)

1. Part 2 is titled, "Pifas and Gigi and the Politics of Hollywood." Define politics in your own words. Describe what you think the "politics of Hollywood" means. What similarities or differences exist between your two responses?
2. Do you think this story could take place anywhere or only in the specific setting of Hollywood? Explain your response.
3. On pg. 74, Angel asks everyone to play a game called "What-are-we-going-to-do-when-we-leave-Hollywood?" How do Gigi, René, Pifas, Sammy, and Angel respond? Substitute the word "Hollywood" with "High school." How would you respond?




Explain your answer.

4. Why did Pifas lie about getting drafted? Do you agree with his reasoning that there are two kinds of people in this world? What do you think he is really saying about life and opportunity?
5. What happens inside Sammy when Gigi sings “La gloria eres tú?” How did Pifas respond? Sammy believes the world should end “with boys turning into men as they listen to a woman sing.” What do you think he is trying to say? Come up with your own poetic statement on how you think the world should end.
6. At the end of chapter nine, Gigi chooses to make Pifas feel like he is worth something. What do you learn about Sammy as a result of her decision? Do you think less of Gigi as a person? Why or why not. How would you describe Pifas to a friend?
7. Why did Gigi want to run for Senior Class President? What were some of Sammy’s doubts at first? What message did Gigi get across in her speech and how did that win her votes?
8. On pg. 110, Sammy observes that democracy isn’t always a simple thing. What do you think he means by that statement? Besides winning votes, what other factors influence winning a campaign? How were the results of Gigi’s campaign and Hubert Humphrey’s campaign similar?

Session III: Assign Part 3 (pg. 113-171)

1. Part 3 is titled, “Another Name for Exile.” What does exile mean to you? Define exile using a dictionary. Brainstorm and list some of your own names for exile.
2. Sammy mentions that he was fearless as a boy and not afraid of anything. Were you afraid of anything when you were little? Why or why not. He comments how fear is something he is bound to learn sooner or later. Do you agree? Why or why not.
3. What did Sammy believe about himself on the inside that had caused him to be afraid? How did his encounter on the street with Father Fallon bring self-discovery? Have you ever questioned why you believe the things you do? Describe what you learned as a result. If not, examine your current beliefs and explore what relevance and importance they hold for you now.
4. On pg. 135, Sammy tells René that high school kids don’t know anything about love. How would you define the notion of love? Do dating and going out with someone play a role in your definition? What are your own truths about love based on your life experiences?
5. Do you agree with Sammy that gringos who speak Spanish are considered more cool than Mexicans who can speak English? Why or why not. Why do you think this is Sammy’s belief?
6. How is Sammy’s identity affected by culture? How do you think your identity is affected by culture? How do cultural perceptions and expectations influence what one believes?
7. Many versions of La Llorona exist. Have you heard the story before? If so, what kind of story do you think it is? If not, find a version and read the story. What differences are



there between Sammy's version and Gigi's version of La Llorona? How can the same story be so different yet so familiar? Is it important where this story takes place? Why or why not.


8. How much better off are gay teens today as compared to the late 1960's? Do you think we are living in more tolerant times in general? If so, provide specific examples that demonstrate why you believe we are living in a more tolerant society (i.e. racial, sexual, religious, etc.). If not, what do you think still needs to happen in order to become a more tolerant society?
9. Examine this statement: Love is another word for belonging. Elaborate on what you think is meant by the statement. How does Sammy conclude that love is another name for exile? Include in your response his reflections concerning Gigi and Pifas, Eric and Jaime, and his situation with Juliana.

Session IV: Assign Part 4 (pg. 173-246)

1. Part 4 is titled, "The Citizens of Hollywood Rise Up Against the System." How do you feel about big systems and/or big bureaucracies? Do you think they can be avoided? What do you perceive as universal or endemic problems inherent in big systems? How can an individual go about creating changes that can make a positive difference? Be realistic and consider protocol in your response.
2. Why was not wearing a belt considered a situation at Sammy's school? What do you learn about Sammy, the administration, certain teachers, and the times as a result? Do you think dress-codes serve a purpose at school and/or the workplace? Why or why not. What areas of your life require certain kinds of formalities on how to dress?
3. Why do you think Reyes chose to escape from life with heroin? What happens inside people that leads them away from hope to despair? How do you keep hope alive in you? Be specific.
4. What do you think broke inside Sammy after Reyes' death? Why does Sammy feel a sudden need to fix things? What does he decide to do? How does he go about it?
5. Describe what you believe Mrs. Davis sees in Sammy. How does Sammy know that she supports him in his beliefs and actions? Find at least three examples to support your answer.
6. Why won't Sammy leave Hollywood? Do you plan to leave your home town after graduation? Why or why not. Do you think home is a place or a feeling? Explain your response.
7. Gigi wonders whether to lie to Pifas or to tell him the truth. Do you agree that there are certain situations or times when lying seems the right thing to do? In Gigi's case, do you think telling the truth would have been more hurtful? Why or why not.
8. Did you think Pifas would come home dead or alive? Why? What truth gets revealed when Sammy says "we've learned something" to the Colonel?

Session V: Assign Part 5 (pg. 247-291)

1. Part 5 is titled, "Welcome to Hollywood." Think of how you have felt in new places




upon arrival. What elements or factors make a place feel welcoming to you? Non-welcoming? Explain your response.

2. Describe the pigeon Sammy has within him. When does he notice it? How does it influence his actions and feelings? Do you have something similar that helps to direct or guide you? If so, how would you describe your “pigeon?” If not, create an image that represents how you feel when you sense something or when you take risks or enter into unknown situations.
3. What does graduation mean to you? What does it mean to Sammy when he says it was a group thing? Do you feel the same way? Why or why not.
4. How does Sammy tell his father about what had happened to him in the accident? What is the main message exchanged between Sammy and his father as a result? What would you say if you were in a similar situation with someone in your family?
5. Why does Sammy have mixed feelings about having plans? What kinds of plans do you have for yourself? How do you feel when plans change?
6. What does Sammy learn about himself when everyone else believes he should paint his truck? How do you respond to the influence of others when it comes to being acceptable in their eyes? How do you separate your own choices from those that seem to be made for you? Name at least one decision you have made that reflects something you decided for yourself.
7. What two meaningful things does Mrs. Apodaca give to Sammy? What role has Mrs. Apodaca played in Sammy’s life? In what ways do you think Mrs. Apodaca will continue to influence Sammy after her death?
8. On pg. 290, how old do you think Sammy is when is trying to remember the boy he was? Who is the younger child in you? How are you similar to that child and how are you different now? What do you think time and age does to who we are on the inside?
9. If you could be anybody for just one day, who would you be? Why? What small steps can you take each day to make you and your life happier as you live it?

AFTER READING

Ask students to reflect on what they think life in high school in the late 1960’s would have been like for them. Have them brainstorm what they remember reading that reveals specific characteristics that are time-sensitive. Organize students into pairs or small groups. Advise them to skim the entire story and find examples or details that are specific to life in the late 1960’s. Provide an example like the following on pg. 260: “On the radio, Janis Joplin was asking the Lord to buy her a Mercedes Benz. In 1969, she was still alive.” Require that students note page numbers and have them categorize their findings into specific sub-headings. Sample headings or categories might include: cars, music, style of clothes, place names, attitudes, foods, habits, etc.

Revisit the conversation on death and grief, and the issues of loss and separation. Have students reflect on the situations that Sammy faced in the story. Ask students to compare and contrast ways that Sammy handled his losses with losses they have personally experienced. Initiate a discussion on the topic, “Communicating Effectively.” Examine with students the



author's use of non-standard or Chicano-based English and Spanish (see pg. 38 as an example). Explore how dialects reflect who people are and how they think. Guide students in the understanding of how language is not hierarchical but a by-product of time and circumstance as well as region and culture. Discuss the author's use of dialogue and its function to the effectiveness of communication in the story. Find specific examples as a group to illustrate the author's distinct Mexican-American literary style.

Ask students to reread the letters from Jaime and Pifas (see pages 220-225) and to review Gigi's dilemma on whether to write Pifas or not (see pages 233-236). Have students observe the use of tone, voice and point of view. Give students a choice and ask them to write a letter as if they were Sammy responding to Jaime or Pifas, or as if they were Gigi and she does write the letter to Pifas. Before writing their letter, recommend students research specific situations and study the way Sammy and Gigi use language. The objective is to reflect their point of view or voice as accurately as possible.

CURRICULUM COVERAGE AND INTERNET EXTENSIONS

Language Arts: Productive Skills and Receptive Skills

Productive Skill Areas: Writing and Speaking

Writing Skills: Response to text/others; description skills; writing for a variety of purposes—to express, to discover, to reflect; journal writing; letter writing; categorical writing

Speaking Skills: Response to text/others; description skills; individual/group discussion skills; exploration of universal themes; self-expression

Receptive Skill Areas: Reading, Listening, Viewing and Cognitive

Reading Skills: Setting purposes for reading; prior knowledge; vocabulary development; connection to personal experience; cultural information; contemporary literature of the United States as a record of human experience and as tool for understanding diverse ethnic groups

Listening Skills: Enjoy and appreciate input of others; connection to common interests and issues of others; exploration of the American and Mexican-American experience

Viewing Skills: Visual literacy, interpretation skills; visualization skills

Cognitive Academic Skills: Critical thinking; application of thinking skills; comprehension skills; compare/contrast skills; vocabulary development—standard and non-standard English and Spanish; identification of main themes; cultural characteristics and relevance


Generalized Language Arts Content Standards

1. READING AND LISTENING FOR COMPREHENSION:

- a. Students will apply strategies and skills to comprehend information that is read, heard and viewed.
- b. Students read and understand a variety of materials.
- c. Students read to locate, select and make use of relevant information

2. WRITING AND SPEAKING FOR EXPRESSION:

- a. Students will communicate effectively through speaking and writing.
- b. Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences.

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- c. Students write and speak using conventional grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.
 3. **LITERATURE:**
 - a. Students will use literature to develop an understanding of people, societies, and self.
 - b. Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience
 4. **COGNITIVE:**
 - a. Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.

Internet Links for Extension Activities

www.ccsf.edu/Resources/Tolerance/res.html (Extensive listing of web-sites that focus on the teaching of tolerance. Categories include: Resources for Teachers: Lesson Plans and Ideas; Resources for Students; Relevant and Thought-provoking Articles; Projects for Students; and Organizations, Institutions and Museums).

www.google.com (Type in “Teaching Tolerance” for excellent sampling of links on tolerance and diversity issues)

www.tolerance.org (Key sub-site extracted from listings above)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Benjamin Alire Sáenz

Benjamin Alire Sáenz was born in 1954 in Old Picacho, a small farming village outside of Las Cruces, New Mexico, forty-two miles north of the U.S. / Mexico border. He was the fourth of seven children and was brought up in a traditional Mexican-American Catholic family. He entered the seminary in 1972, a decision that was as much political as it was religious. After concluding his theological studies at the University of Louvain, he was ordained a Catholic priest. Three and a half years later, he left the priesthood.

At the age of 30, he entered the University of Texas at El Paso. He later received a fellowship at the University of Iowa. In 1988, he received a Wallace E. Stegner Fellowship in poetry from Stanford University. In 1993, he returned to the border to teach in the bilingual MFA program at UTEP.

Sáenz is the author of a previous book of poetry, *Calendar of Dust*, which won an American Book Award. He is also the author of a collection of short stories, two novels, and two books for children, *A Gift from Papá Diego / Un regalo de Papá Diego* and *Grandma Fina and Her Wonderful Umbrellas / La abuelita Fina y sus sombrillas maravillosas*. An essay by Ben Sáenz entitled "Exile, El Paso, Texas," appears in another Cinco Puntos Press book, *The Late Great Mexican Border*.