

Call Me Consuelo

by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman

Themes

- Family
- Friendship
- Adjusting to a new environment



When Consuelo Harburton is suddenly orphaned, she resists going to live in Los Angeles with her grandmother, Grace. Consuelo wants to live in the small mining town of Dos Palos with her Tía Alma and Tío Fernando. She feels as if her tía and tío are “second best” to having her own parents.

But when Tío Fernando loses his job in the mine, Grace comes to bring the reluctant eleven-year-old Consuelo to live with her. Initially, Consuelo dreams of returning to her Mexican-American family in Dos Palos. But as Consuelo becomes involved in the mystery surrounding several neighborhood burglaries, she experiences a profound sense of belonging in her new life with a loving grandmother.

CRITIC'S PRAISE

“A satisfying adventure story for all young people, but especially so for Hispanic students looking to read about someone with their heritage.”
—*School Library Journal*

“Intrigue, danger, and excitement dramatically weave themselves into Consuelo Harburton’s new life.”
—*ESL Resource Catalog*

TEACHING OVERVIEW

Call Me Consuelo explores the issue of grandparents as parents as well as a story of “fitting in” to new situations. Consuelo adjusts to, a new school, a new living situation, and a new set of friends. The characters and situations lend nicely to exploring the universal themes of self-identity, friendship, dealing with differences, and finding one’s place in this world. The novel is an ideal read and discussion tool for the upper-elementary or middle school reader and is recommended for readers who like adventure-detective stories.

This Teacher Guide offers Language Art activities, which satisfy generalized content standards. The teacher is encouraged to expand upon the following activities and to creatively substitute and/or incorporate other reading and writing activities into their Language Arts instruction.



COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

The following Before, During and After Comprehension strategies contain activities for improving listening/speaking, reading, writing and viewing skills. (Note: For the purposes of this study guide, viewing skills refer to the student's ability to understand and interpret visual images, messages, and meanings.) Where appropriate, the skill set addressed by each of the activities is noted in parenthesis.

BEFORE READING

Write out Webster's definition of the word "nostalgic" on the board: adj. **1:** A bittersweet longing for persons, things, or situations of the past; **2:** Homesickness. Encourage students to elaborate or expand upon Webster's definition (**Reading:** word identification, using dictionary).

In small groups, ask students to discuss the following prompts: What does the word nostalgic mean for you?; When have you felt nostalgic?; Have you lost a prized possession or precious item that you feel nostalgic about? Ask students to draft and summarize their thoughts and/or findings on notebook or scratch paper. Encourage them to be creative, graphic and visual when transferring their final ideas to their piece of chart paper (**Writing:** purposes/writing to express, discover and explore).

Ask each small group to present their written/visual summary to the class (**Viewing:** production of visuals to complement and extend meanings). All members of the small group should participate in the presentation. Ask the other students to listen to those presenting (**Listening /**

Speaking: purposes/ to gain information, to enjoy and appreciate). Make space for displaying projects while reading the book. Ask students to be alert readers and to notice when examples of nostalgia occur throughout the story.

Invite students to study the cover of the book. Ask students what they notice about character, setting and multiculturalism (**Reading:** comprehension, connections that cross culture). Have students make predictions about the story using the cover art, back cover writing and the title (**Reading:** prediction, prior knowledge).

Introduce Glossary of Spanish Terms (See Attached Glossary). Make copies available for each student and present the Spanish vocabulary, names & places they will encounter in the story (**Reading:** word identification, vocabulary development). Highlight use of accents, note similarities and differences of spelling and sounds, and discuss the concept of borrowed words (**Writing:** influence of other cultures/languages on English).

AS READING PROGRESSES

Assign *Call Me Consuelo* for five different sessions (**Reading:** fluency/reading silently). Have students refer to glossary as they encounter Spanish vocabulary words or ideas (**Reading:** vocabulary development).

Pose your own or the following questions to students. (**Reading:** comprehension). The questions can serve as prompts for in-class or group discussions (**Listening / Speaking:** listening / speaking / appreciation) and / or as written assignments (**Writing:** writing for a variety of purposes; to express, to discover, to record, to develop, to reflect on ideas, and / or to problem solve).

Session I: Assign Chapters 1–3 (pp. 5–25)

1. Consuelo does not like to be called Connie. Why do you think being called Connie made her so upset? Have you ever experienced something similar? Describe what happened. If not, imagine what it might feel like and share your response.
2. Consuelo starts a new life with her grandmother leaving her friends, town and extended family behind. What kinds of comforts and distractions help ease Consuelo's loneliness and adjustment?
3. Consuelo says that her Tía Alma and Tío Fernando were second best to having her own folks. What do you think she means? What characteristics are important for parents or guardians to have?
4. What did Consuelo learn from her cousin Rebecca about trees?
5. What is Consuelo determined to do no matter what? Why?

Session II: Assign Chapters 4–7 (pp. 26–60)

1. Consuelo says that she was hungry for the chili beans at the school cafeteria, since she had eaten refried beans at every meal in Dos Palos. Have you ever gotten homesick for particular food or meal? If so, what was it? If not, what would you think it would be if you were away from home?
2. How does Mr. Crane treat Consuelo when she has trouble with her key in the gate at Shadywood Knolls? On pg. 33 Mr. Crane says to Consuelo, "Go on back where you belong!" What do you think he is really saying? What is revealed about his character?
3. How does Consuelo meet Rusty? Why is Rusty so interested in the fort and movie lot?
4. What are the two main concerns that get discussed at the council meeting?
5. How do you think the oranges got inside the storeroom? Who do you think wrote the note addressed to "Mrs. Harburton?"
6. How did Lish and Consuelo escape from the movie lot? How did Consuelo ensure that they could get back in the same way?
7. How did Rusty know they were in there? Why might this be important later in the story?
8. Do you think Consuelo's grandmother, Grace, is talking with Tío Fernando? Why or why not?

Session III: Assign Chapters 8–11 (pp. 61–97)

1. How did Consuelo feel when she learned that the man was Juan Pablo instead of her Tío Fernando?

2. Why does Consuelo decide not to share the note with her grandmother?
3. Why was the locket so important to Consuelo? What connection does Consuelo now make to the clinking sound she heard on pg. 52?
4. Consuelo overhears two men talking when she sneaks back to search for her locket. She learns that they have guns. How does she get out of there without them hearing her?
5. Who does Consuelo meet in the tobacco store? How does the author, Ofelia Dumas Lachtman, use dialogue and description to portray this new character?
6. What kind of “desperate trouble” is Consuelo’s new friend facing?
7. What is happening to Rebecca’s influence on Consuelo? Why do you think this is happening?
8. Rusty and Domingo are unaccepting of Consuelo’s new friend. How does Consuelo stick up for her new friend?

Session IV: Assign Chapters 12–14 (pp. 98–128)

1. Describe the difference between Operation Bookbag and Operation Camera.
2. How does Consuelo feel when Emilia invites her to sit in the corner with the other Spanish speakers? On pg. 104 Emilia says, “Don’t be like Domingo . . . he doesn’t know where he belongs.” What do you think Emilia means by that comment?

AFTER READING

Viewing Activities:

1. Note the illustration on pg. 66. Why do you think the illustrator, Virginia Roeder, decided to make this the first one? What does this illustration reveal about character and plot? (**Viewing:** interpretation; how illustration extends meaning of text).
2. Note illustrations on pg. 107 and pg. 117 and pg. 122. Why do you think the illustrator chose to put so many illustrations close together? How does each one add to your understanding of the story? (**Viewing:** representing; how illustrator’s choice of elements helps to represent the text’s meaning).
3. Note the illustration on pg. 148. What mood does the illustrator create? What details are used to make this effect work for you? (**Viewing:** interpretation; understanding visual image, message and meaning).
4. Invite students to draw their favorite scene in the novel (**Viewing:** production; producing visual to extend or represent meaning).

3. How are robbers and burglars different?
4. What were Domingo and Consuelo hoping to see amidst the stolen items?
5. How was the roll of red crepe paper helpful? Did it work?
6. On pg. 128, Mr. Neeland says that one has to draw the line on what one does for his or her friends. Where would you draw the line on what you would do for a friend?

Session V: Assign Chapters 15–17 (pp. 129–149)

1. What did Consuelo’s grandmother have planned that was extra special? How did Consuelo acknowledge the situation? Have you ever been able to detect disappointment in someone’s voice? What did you notice?
2. On pg. 137 Grace says she likes red because it is a very satisfying color. Why does this make Consuelo grin? Do you agree that red is a happy color? Why or why not.
3. What do we learn about Mr. Crane?
4. On pg. 141 Grace says, “It’s hard to lose things that are important to you.” Do you think she is referring to the safe or to something else? How can you tell? What have you lost that is important to you?
5. Why do you think Consuelo decided to stay with her grandmother instead of returning to Dos Palos? What would you have done? Explain your response.

Writing Activities:

1. Ask students to pretend they are Consuelo. Ask them to write a letter to her cousin Rebecca detailing why she won’t be returning to Dos Palos. (**Writing:** purposes; to express, to reflect on ideas).
2. Ask students to find at least five sections where Ellen is using her “book-like” English. Ask them to write the page number and the exact word-choice (**Writing:** purposes; to record, to discover).
3. On several occasions, Consuelo notices that she disappoints her grandmother. Ask students to find at least two examples. Ask them to note page numbers and rewrite the scenarios in their own words (**Writing:** purposes; to explain, to describe).
4. Encourage students to correspond by letter or e-mail with relatives who live far away (**Writing:** practical usage/connections).

OTHER FOLLOW-UP/EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students to compare and contrast where they live to somewhere else they have been that is either larger or smaller in population. Brainstorm with students the different ways they could portray their information: venn diagram; listing similarities and then differences; categorizing or organizing by characteristics or sub-topics like size, features, geography, etc. (**Writing:** writing / inquiry / research).
2. Ask students to design book cover with front cover illustration,

- title, author and back cover summary. Encourage use of technology in their writing and designing (**Writing:** presenting information in various forms using available technology).
3. Ask students to research and learn more about Chinese culture and share their findings with the class. Utilize students and community members if available to educate and share their knowledge (**Reading:** reading/culture/inquiry/research).

About the Author



OFELIA DUMAS LACHTMAN was born in Los Angeles to Mexican-immigrant parents. She attended Los Angeles city schools, including Los Angeles City College and a brief stint at UCLA before marrying and moving to Riverside, California.

Her stories have been published widely in the United States, including prize-winning books for Piñata Books, such as *The Girl from Playa Blanca* (Piñata Books, 1995). She has written four other novels for young adults: *A Good Place for Maggie* (Piñata Books, 2002), *The Summer of El Pintor* (Piñata Books, 2001), *Call Me Consuelo* (Piñata Books, 1997), and *Leticia's Secret* (Piñata Books, 1997). She is also the creator of the Pepita series of bilingual picture books for children that includes: *Pepita Finds Out / Lo que descubre Pepita* (Piñata Books, 2002), *Pepita Takes Time / Pepita, siempre tarde* (Piñata Books, 2000), *Pepita Thinks Pink / Pepita y el color rosado* (Piñata Books, 1998), and *Pepita Talks Twice / Pepita habla dos veces* (Piñata Books, 1995). Dumas Lachtman is the author of two other bilingual picture books not in the Pepita series: *Tina and the Scarecrow Skins / Tina y las pieles de espantapájaros* (Piñata Books, 2002) and *Big Enough / Bastante grande* (Piñata Books, 1998). Dumas Lachtman, the mother of two children, resides in Los Angeles.

OTHER YOUNG ADULT NOVELS BY OFELIA DUMAS LACHTMAN

The Girl from Playa Blanca
ISBN 1-55885-149-6, \$9.95
Ages 11 and up, Grades 5-8

A Good Place for Maggie
ISBN 1-55885-372-3, \$9.95
Ages 11 and up, Grades 5-8

Leticia's Secret
ISBN 1-55885-209-3, \$7.95
Ages 8-12, Grades 3-7

The Summer of El Pintor
ISBN 1-55885-327-8, \$9.95
Ages 11 and up / Grades 5-8

CONNECTING WITH THE INTERNET/TECHNOLOGY

www.kidsclick.org (Useful for finding other books related to similar themes).
www.yahooligans.com (good for research extension on detective stories or stories about orphans for example)
www.ajkids.com (kid version of askjeeves, very suitable for posing questions)

ADDITIONAL READING/OTHER BOOKS

Carlson-Savage, Natalie. *A Grandmother for the Orphelines*. (90 pg., illus.) The orphelines search for a grandmother. They find one, along with a grandfather, on Christmas Eve.

Cleaver, Vera and Bill. *Queen of Hearts*. (160 pg.) Although there is no love between them, twelve-year old Wilma is her willful and peppery grandmother's choice for a companion during an extended illness.

Hest, Amy. *When Jessie Came Across The Sea*. (39 pg., illus.) A thirteen-year old Jewish orphan reluctantly leaves her grandmother and immigrates to New York City. She works for three years sewing lace and earning money to bring her grandmother to the United States.

Pfeffer, Susan Beth. *Nobody's Daughter*. (154 pg.) In 1913, eleven-year old Emily is sent to the Austen Home for Orphaned Girls. She copes with her difficult circumstances with the help of the town librarian, and the hope of finding her younger sister.

Richardson, Arleta. *Across The Border*. (128 pg.) Through prayer, thirteen-year old Ethan meets the challenges of moving with his adopted family to a homestead in Mexico.

Webster, Jean. *Daddy-Long-Legs*. (192 pg.) A simplified retelling of orphan Judy Abbot's college adventures. She relates her thoughts and experiences by writing letters to an anonymous and mysterious benefactor that she nicknames Daddy-Long-Legs.

Vocabulary

GLOSSARY OF SPANISH TERMS

| VOCABULARIO/VOCABULARY (Boh-cah-boo-lah-'ree-oh) | | NOMBRES / NAMES (*Nohm-brehs) | | |
|---|---|---|---|------------------|
| adios (ah-dee-'ohs) | farewell, good-bye | Alicia | Guapo (handsome)* | Monica |
| arroyo (ah-'rroh-yoh) | ravine, rivulet, small river, stream, brook, gutter; (figurative) street | Domingo (Sunday)* | Isabella | Rebecca |
| barrio (*bah-'ree-oh) | neighborhood | Emilia | Juan | Tía Alma (soul)* |
| buenas tardes (*bweh-nahs 'tahr-dehs) | good afternoon | Felicia | Juan Pablo | Tío Fernando |
| consuelo (cohn-'sweh-lo) | consolation, comfort, joy | Fernando | Maria Consuelo (full name) | |
| gracias a Dios (*grah-s'yahs ah D'yohs) | thank God | Gato (cat)* | | |
| guapo (*gwah-poh) | handsome, good looking | | | |
| menudo (meh-'noo-doh) | soup, made with cow or pig insides | | | |
| Nuestra casa es tu casa, chiquita (nwehs-'wehs-trah 'kah-sah ehs too 'kah-sah chee-'kee-tah) | Our house is your house, little one. | | | |
| | | | LUGARES/PLACES (loo-'gah-rrehhs) *Literal meanings | |
| | | Dos Palos (Two sticks)* | Los Angeles (The angels)* | |
| | | La Olla (The Stewpot)* | | |
| | | BORROWED WORDS (understood food items)** | | |
| | | Cafeteria | Enchiladas** | |
| | | Chili** | Salsa** | |
| | | Cilantro** | Tortillas** | |

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