

Alamo Wars

Ray Villarreal

Curriculum Guide by Myra Infante, University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley

Synopsis

An entire school community is in an uproar about a play re-igniting the battle for the Alamo! Seventh-grader and Golden Gloves boxer Marco Díaz is, at first, excited to be chosen to play Jim Bowie, the brave Texan who defended the Alamo against Santa Anna's Mexican Army. But his friend Raquel, an undocumented immigrant, calls him a sell-out because she believes the play makes heroes out of the people who stole her ancestors' land. And the new English teacher Sandy Martínez finds the Mexican characters' dialogue not only politically incorrect but downright offensive. But the veteran teaching staff and parents in the community are adamantly opposed to making changes to the script.

Weary from struggling with disruptive kids, teachers' and students' dropping out of the play and parents with unreasonable expectations, everyone begins to wonder if they should just give up and cancel the production.

Teaching Overview

Alamo Wars is set in a Texas community which includes students from different cultural (Caucasian, Mexican-American, and Mexican) and socioeconomic groups. Traditionally, Texans view the Battle of the Alamo as a heroic act by legendary heroes such as David Crockett. *Alamo Wars* introduces readers to a different perspective, that of those fighting on the side of the Mexican Army. It is important for teachers to note the variety of perspectives amongst students with ties to the Mexican culture. For example, Raquel is an undocumented student who explores issues pertinent to Mexico and immigrants with which her American-born friend Marco does not agree despite his Mexican ancestry. This conflict is further complicated by students with little or no ties to the Mexican culture and who have been instilled with a deep Texan pride by parents and teachers. Teachers should be aware of the different interpretations of the historical battle that took place at The Alamo.

Texas State Standards – (6th -9th)

Reading comprehension strategies

Before Reading

Making Connections

During Reading

Cause and Effect

After Reading

Making Predictions

Writing Prompts

1. Personal Narrative: In the novel *Alamo Wars*, Ms. Martínez and Raquel often have different ideas than their peers. Write a personal narrative about a time that you didn't agree with your friends or classmates. Be sure to write about your experience in detail and describe why it is memorable.
2. Expository: Explain the difference in cultural perspective between the characters of Raquel and Marco.
3. Persuasive: In the novel *Alamo Wars*, Mrs. Pruitt initially voices disapproval of Ms. Martínez' and Raquel's perspective of the Battle of the Alamo, preferring to teach what the Texas History textbook traditionally included. However, later in the play she changes her mind and says, "What if somewhere in the play we add a couple of lines that show the Mexicans' perspective of the Alamo story?"
School administrators, textbook companies and teachers are often at odds as to what to teach students. Write an essay stating your position on whether it is better for teachers to teach only what is included in approved textbooks or teach multiple perspectives of historical events not included in traditional textbooks.

Vocabulary

Unheralded (13)	appearing without fanfare or publicity
Dissuaded (15)	to persuade somebody not to do something
Pulverize (21)	to subject an opponent to a crushing defeat
Dilapidated (21)	partly ruined or decayed, especially as a result of neglect
Douse (31)	to put out a light, fire, or flame, especially with water
Admonish (74)	to advise somebody to do or, more often, not to do something
Livid (79)	Furious; very angry
Siege (81)	a military or police operation in which troops or the police surround a place and cut off all outside access to force surrender
Brawler (81)	A person involved in a noisy fight, especially in a public place
Unsheathed (83)	to remove a sword from its case or covering
Ingrate (86)	somebody who shows or feels no gratitude
Conspiratorial (93)	indicating or betraying knowledge of or involvement in a secret plan or agreement between two or more people to commit an illegal or subversive act

Suture (107)	a piece of material used to close a wound or connect tissues, e.g. catgut, thread, or wire
Cowered (108)	to cringe or move backward defensively in fear
Prerogative (119)	an exclusive privilege or right enjoyed by a person or group occupying a particular rank or position
Instigated (120)	to cause trouble, especially by urging somebody to do something destructive or wrong
Sinewy (128)	lean, tough, and muscular
Lackluster (135)	lacking energy, excitement, enthusiasm, or passion
Mused (147)	think about something in a deep and serious or dreamy and abstracted way
Chortled (149)	a noisy gleeful laugh
Pelted (150)	to bombard somebody or something with many blows or missiles
Befuddled (162)	Confused or perplexed
Ominous (176)	suggesting or indicating that something bad is going to happen or be revealed
Resonated (178)	to echo, or cause something to echo
Billowed (178)	to move upward or along in a curling or rolling mass

Discussion Questions

1. How would you characterize Ms. Martínez based on her “Pegasus” story and theme in Chapter Nine?
2. Why was Raquel offended by the way the Mexican characters' lines were written? (Page 72)
3. What characters change in the novel? How do they change? Why do they change?
4. What characters don't change in the novel?
5. What are the author's values, beliefs, and attitudes? How do you know?
6. What do you think Ms. Mac would have thought of the changes that were made to her play? What evidence do we see in the text?
7. Why does Ms. Martínez accuse the other teachers of giving Billy preferential treatment? Do you think Ms. Martínez was right? Why?
8. How would you characterize Ms. Mac?
9. What damage does Mrs. Pruitt think Ms. Martínez has caused?
10. Why is Raquel upset with Mrs. Pruitt's telling of the Alamo story?
11. Why doesn't Marco care about immigration issues?
12. Why does Ms. Martínez put the test papers face down before inviting Agatha's mom to sit?

13. How would you characterize Mrs. Hornbuckle?
14. Do you think Ms. Martínez is justified in refusing to teach the dances?
15. Why was Marco unsure if Raquel liked him or not?
16. Why would having the Mexican characters speak Spanish be more authentic?
17. Why wouldn't it matter if the audience didn't understand what they were saying?
18. Why did Mrs. Pruitt like the Spanish dialogue?

Extensions

1. Have students re-write the sections of the novel in comic book form. Students should remain true to any physical or setting descriptions. [Free Comic Strip Templates](#)
2. Have students select or write 10 poems or songs that they feel say something about the theme, mood, characters or settings of the novel. Have students write an essay explaining why they selected or wrote each poem or song.
3. Have students keep a diary from a main character's point of view. Students should include the character's thoughts and feelings, actions, and significant events from the entire novel.
4. Have students select a character from the book. Then have them select ten quotations from the text that they feel reveal the character's personality. They must explain what each quotation/sentence tells them about the character.

About the author

RAY VILLAREAL is the author of five novels for young adults that capture the angst of adolescent life: *Body Slammed!* (Piñata Books, 2012), *Don't Call Me Hero* (Piñata Books, 2011), *Who's Buried in the Garden?* (Piñata Books, 2009), winner of LAUSD's Westchester Fiction Award, *Alamo Wars* (Piñata Books, 2008), and *My Father, the Angel of Death* (Piñata Books, 2006), which was nominated to the 2008-2009 Lone Star Reading List and named to The New York Public Library's 2007 Books for the Teen Age. His forthcoming novel, *On the Other Side of the Bridge*, will be published by Piñata Books in October 2014. Villareal worked for 30 years as a teacher and an instructional reading coach with the Dallas Independent School District, and his knowledge of kids is obvious in his characters' dialogue and the problems they deal with. As *Kirkus Reviews* said in its review of *Who's Buried in the Garden?*: "a solid glimpse at seventh-grade life from a writer who understands the age—biography reports, friendships made and lost, crushes, misbehavior and, sometimes, quiet heroism." He graduated in 1981 from Southern Methodist University with a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education with an emphasis in Bilingual Education. In 1991, he completed his Master of Liberal Arts from the same university. He lives with his family in Dallas, Texas.

Related media

[The 1836 Battle \(website\)](#)

[History of The Alamo \(website\)](#)

[Videos about The Alamo](#)

[A Mexican View of The War in Texas \(website\)](#)

[Information about the Dream Act \(website\)](#)

Further Reading

Love, D. Anne. *I Remember the Alamo*. New York: Yearling, 2001

Bunting, Eve, and Michael Dooling. *Walking to School*. New York: Clarion, 2008

Gallo, Donald R. *First Crossings: Stories About Teen Immigrants* Candlewick; Reprint edition, 2007