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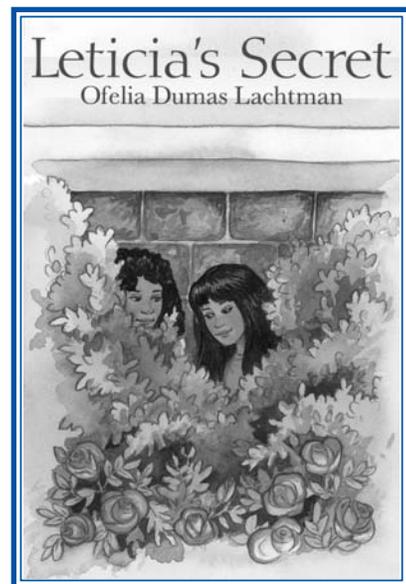
PIÑATA BOOKS



TEACHER'S GUIDE

Leticia's Secret

by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman



Themes

- Family
- Friendship
- Coping with and understanding illness

About the Book

Eleven-year-old Rosario lives in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles. Her same-aged cousin, Leticia, periodically visits from a small town with Tío Felipe.

When Leticia visits, Rosario's mind fills with questions. Why do all the adults of the house treat Leticia like royalty? Why does Nina Sara, her grandmother, expect Rosario to be extra polite when Leticia is around? Why does Tío Felipe whisk Leticia away at strange hours to see important people in the big city? Is she a movie star sworn to secrecy?

As Rosario and Leticia become friends through common interests, Rosario begins to notice little things about Leticia's moods and energy. During a night-time adventure, Leticia is unable to run from danger like Rosario. She confides to share her shocking secret to Rosario: she is dying of cancer.

CRITIC'S PRAISE

"This is a bittersweet tale of life and death, with the added elements of adventure and youthful romance."
—*School Library Journal*

"*Leticia's Secret* is an intriguing, warm-hearted novel . . . a touching book that children will enjoy."
—*Books of the Southwest*

TEACHING OVERVIEW

Leticia's Secret is a story of the secrecy that surrounds the issue of cancer. It is also a story of friendship on many levels. In the Language Arts classroom, *Leticia's Secret* aligns nicely with middle school (5th-7th grade) reading and writing knowledge and skills.

For the teacher's convenience and accountability, this Teacher's Guide offers Language Arts activities that satisfy reading, writing, and viewing skills. 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.



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COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

The following Before, During and After Comprehension strategies contain activities for improving 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

Explore the theme of friendship. Sample topics might include: characteristics of a friend, kinds of friends (relatives, neighbors, school-mates, people of different ages, etc.), activities that friends do together, and common conflicts among friends. Take a large sheet of chart or easel paper and write "A Friend is someone who" at the top. Elicit responses and write out responses in a list. Model how you want general terms like loyalty and trust to be broken down into specifics. For example, if a student says, "A friend is someone who you can trust." Set the question back to the student, "What do you mean by trust?" After several minutes ask students to make their own list (8–10 original ideas) (**Writing:** for a variety of purposes: to express, discover, record, develop, reflect on ideas and/or problem solve). Ask them to rewrite their responses into full sentences. Emphasize how you want students to capitalize and punctuate cor-

rectly to enhance and clarify meaning (**Writing:** mechanics).

Invite students to study the cover of the book. Make predictions about the story using the cover art, the back cover writing, and the title. Have students discuss cross-cultural themes and connections generated by the front and back covers (i.e. names used for characters, attitude toward death, friendship, family issues, etc.) (**Reading:** cross-cultural connections).

Introduce Glossary of Spanish Terms. Make copies available for each student and present the Spanish vocabulary, pronunciations of terms, and names and places they will encounter in story (**Reading:** word identification, using dictionary). 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

Ask students to identify main ideas, make predictions and inferences, and draw conclusions. Encourage students to be engaged thinkers while they read (**Reading:** drawing inferences and supporting with textual evidence).

Assign Leticia's Secret for five different sessions (**Reading:** fluency/silent reading). Have students refer to glossary regularly as they encounter Spanish vocabulary words or ideas (**Reading:** vocabulary development).

Ask students to write a journal entry after finishing each assigned reading session (i.e. at least five entries are expected). Encourage them to make observations or to interpret how they feel about what they read. For those who have difficulty finding things to write about, ask students to incorporate the discussion questions as a basis for an entry (**Reading:** interpret text through journal writing and discussion). Pose your own or the following questions to students (**Reading:** use his/her knowledge and experience to comprehend).

Session I: Assign Chapters 1–3 (pp. 9–41)

1. Why was Rosario so concerned about her yellow notebook? How would you feel if you lost a special notebook that contained your secret thoughts?
2. According to Tío Felipe, "there are a lot of things to be considered." What do you think he means?
3. What do you notice about the names used for the characters so far?
4. What was so special about "The Aerie?" What kinds of images come to mind when you think of a special place?
5. Rosario observes that Leticia is nice, but kind of funny. Find examples in the story that support Rosario's observations.

Session II: Assign Chapters 4–6 (pp. 43–72)

1. Why do you think Leticia come to Los Angeles? What clues make Rosario and Jenny think she comes to be in the movies or on TV?
2. How would you feel if someone entered a piece of your writing for a contest without your permission? Do you think Lalo wrote the poem? Why or why not?
3. What role does Mr. Milliken play in Rosario's life?
4. Why is Rosario jealous of Leticia? How does Mr. Milliken help Rosario see herself differently?
5. Where do you think the truck was going? How would you feel to be in the back of a moving truck with strangers up front driving?

Session III: Assign Chapters 7–9 (pp. 73–96)

1. Why do you think Leticia is so preoccupied with the time that she gets back to her Papá?
2. How do you think Leticia felt after telling Rosario her secret? How do you think Rosario felt after hearing the secret? How will their lives be different now knowing Leticia's secret?
3. Do you think it would be scarier to wait behind and hide in the dark or to go for help without knowing where you were? Explain your response.
4. Who did you think was chasing Rosario when she was trapped in her hiding place? How did the author create suspense?

Session IV: Assign Chapters 10–11 (pp. 97–112)

1. Do you speak Spanish? What do we learn about Nina’s character when she said she called the school?
2. Do you think it is more difficult for the person who is sick or the person who is worried about someone who is sick? Explain your response.
3. How do you think the story will end?

Session V: Assign Chapters 12–14 (pp. 113–126)

1. What two surprising things happened within the hour after Leticia left?
2. What more do we learn about Lalo’s character? Think about what friendship means to you. What kinds of things does Lalo do as a friend for Rosario?
3. What did Leticia and Rosario promise each other that they would do?
4. When people die, the memory is what lives on. What did Rosario do to help keep the memory of Leticia alive in her heart?

AFTER READING

Writing Activity: Have students think about the changes that Leticia and Rosario undergo after Leticia shares her secret (**Reading:** analyzing characters). Ask students to decide which character they relate to, and ask them write a letter of support.

Follow-Up Activity: Read the letters out loud to the class without revealing who wrote the letter. Ask students to respond in constructive ways to the letters both orally and in writing (**Writing:** constructive evaluation of the writing of others). Have students respond to these kinds of questions: What were the strengths of the letter? What aspects could be improved upon? Ask students to write down their comments on a sheet of paper. Allow students the option of not putting their name on their comments. Collect comments and attach to the letter. Return letters with comments to student who wrote letter.

Alternative Follow-up Activity: Have students type out their letters. Make a copy of each letter and white out their name. Hand each student two or three different letters. Ask students to read let-

ter and then write a response/and or comments and suggestions right on the letter itself. (**Reading:** read to take action). Allow students the option of remaining anonymous in their comments.

Revisit the theme of friendship. Ask students to write about a time when a friend either betrayed them or somehow saved them (they may change the name of their friend for privacy or protection). Do a mini-lesson on apostrophes in contractions and possessives. Use text to site examples (i.e. Leticia’s secret–title; she’s–back cover; I’d, didn’t–p. 55; Lalo’s face, I’m–p. 59). Ask students to provide their own examples or find examples in text. Stipulate that students are to use apostrophes in their writing assignment (**Writing:** write with increasing accuracy when using apostrophes in contractions and possessives).

Encourage students to correspond by letter or e-mail with friends or peers who live close or far away (**Writing:** correspond with peers or others via letters or email).

OTHER FOLLOW-UP/EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Viewing Activities:

1. Note illustrations on pg. 14 and pg. 32. What do they add to your understanding of the story? (**Viewing:** interpretation; how illustration extends meaning of text).
2. Note illustrations on pg. 48 and pg. 58. How does the illustrator Roberta C. Morales portray Lalo and Rosario? What do you learn from the illustrations about Lalo’s and Rosario’s characters? (**Viewing:** interpretation; how illustration extends meaning of text).
3. Note illustrations on pg. 72 and pg. 86. Why do you think the illustrator decided to highlight these two scenes? (**Viewing:**

- representing how illustrator’s choice of elements help to represent the text’s meaning).
4. Note illustration on pg. 110. Does Leticia look sick? (**Viewing:** interpretation; understanding visual image, message and meaning).
5. Note that the illustration on pg. 110 is the last one. Look at it again. Why do you think it is the last one the illustrator decided to do? (**Viewing:** representing how illustrator’s choice of elements help to represent the text’s meaning).
6. Invite students to draw their favorite scene in the novel (**Viewing:** production; producing visual to extend or represent meaning).

Reading and Writing Activities:

1. Create a graphic organizer (semantic map) using the word “Cancer” (**Reading:** Using knowledge to comprehend and **Writing:** organizing prior knowledge). Ask students to explore their feelings associated with knowing someone with or who has died of cancer. Then create a map using categories to organize their thoughts (i.e. a visual with “Cancer” as the defined center). Categories may include kinds of cancer, treatments for cancer, cancer in children versus in adults, etc. (See “Connecting with the Internet/Technology” and “Other Books”). Ask students to make their own graphic organizer using categories that

- match their thoughts and interests as a pre-writing activity (**Writing:** generating ideas for writing) . Encourage students to include in their report/paper suggestions or recommendations for dealing with cancer-related fears and facts based on their graphic organizer/research (**Reading:** reading to take action).
2. Ask students to gather information about cancer and available grief support from their library, local clinic/hospital or support organizations, interviews, and/or on-line and create their own informational file relevant to cancer (**Reading:** use multiple sources to locate information relevant to research including experts, print resources, electronic texts, etc).



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

Call Me Consuelo
ISBN 1-55885-187-9, \$9.95
Ages 8-12, Grades 3-7

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

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.thewritesource.com (Development house of teachers and writers who specialize in handbooks for students of English and Writing at Elementary, Middle School, Junior High School and High School levels).

www.grievingchild.org (Service of Dougy Center to provide peer support groups and materials for grieving children. Web site oriented for children and adults to assist children in grief. Excellent age-appropriate "I'm a Kid" link for related reading and support).

www.chionline.org (Children's Hospice International. Useful site for research and programs regarding children and illness).

www.kidneeds.com (Useful site for researching information about medical conditions).

www.teachercreated.com (Technology catalog and teacher created materials from Tech Tools Resource Kits).

ADDITIONAL READING/OTHER BOOKS

Bennett, Cherie. *Zink*. (256 pg.) With the help of a trio of zebras from Serengeti, sixth-grader Becky faces her battle with leukemia, her family's fears for her, her competition with a hypocritical classmate, and the possibility that she might die.

Haddix, Margaret Peterson. *Don't You Dare Read This Mrs. Dunphrey*. (112 pg.) Tish Bonner is not thrilled that her teacher has required her and the rest of the class to keep a journal as a requirement for passing English. But Mrs. Dunphrey has promised that she will not read any entry marked "do not read." In spite of herself, Tish soon finds herself confiding her most personal thoughts and fears, marking them "do not read."

Smith, Doris Buchanan. *A Taste of Blackberries*. (74pg.) A difficult and sensitive subject, treated with taste and honesty, is woven into this moving story about a young boy and his struggles to accept the accidental death of his best friend.

Warner, Sally. *Sort of Forever*. (128 pg.) Best friends Cady Wharton and Nana Weber have done everything together from riding the scariest roller coaster to cutting each other's hair. The girls have long anticipated their teenage years, but everything changes when Nana, at age 12, is diagnosed with bone cancer.

GLOSSARY OF SPANISH TERMS

VOCABULARIO/VOCABULARY (Boh-cah-boo-'lah-'REE-oh)		NOMBRES / NAMES ('Nohm-brehs ee Loo-'gah-rehs)	
IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE:		Rosario Silva	Carmen
bueno ('bweh-noh)	good	Nina Sara	Lalo Ortega
chorizo (choh-'ree-soh)	sausage	Rubén	Pinto
hola ('oh-lah)	hello	Teresa	Mela
mañana (mah-'nyah-nah)	tomorrow	Leticia	Felipe
mi casa es su casa (mee 'kah-sah ehs soo 'kah-sah)	my house is your house	María	Sepulveda
mi 'jita o mi hijita (mee-'hee-tah) o (mee ee-'hee-tah)	my daughter dear little one)	Luisa	Jorge
mi muchachita (mee moo-chah-'chee-tah)	my little girl	BORROWED WORDS:	
tío ('tee-oh)	uncle	cafeteria	radio
		patio	tortilla

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