

Mi sueño de América
My American Dream

THEMES

Family
Friendship
Moving to a new place
Going to a different country
Cultural diversity

SUMMARY

This bilingual, non-fictional account captures the experience of a young, immigrant girl adjusting to life in the United States

In *Mi sueño de América / My American Dream*, young Yuliana Gallegos recalls her move from Monterrey, Mexico, to Houston, Texas. Initially excited about moving to Houston, where the huge freeways make her feel like she's on a roller coaster, her excitement quickly wanes when she starts school.

Everything is different at Yuli's new school, and her discomfort is magnified by her classmates' stares. "They looked me up and down as if I was from another planet and not from another country." And to make matters worse, she learns that in spite of studying English in Mexico, she can't understand anything that's being said. All she wants to do is go back to her school in Monterrey.

Yuli poignantly records the fear and anguish experienced by all immigrant children as they strive to adjust to a new language and culture. With the help of a compassionate teacher, a Japanese girl who becomes her friend, and her own determination to excel at her studies, Yuli gradually learns to speak English and feel comfortable in her new environment.

Accompanied by black-and-white line drawings, this bilingual story will encourage other kids—whether immigrants or not—to write their own stories.

TEACHING OVERVIEW

This is a wonderful story of one young woman's journey from Mexico to the United States. It is an excellent book to use to begin a discussion about many different themes – the first day of school, moving to a new place, fitting in, making friends, travel. The book is especially useful for educators working with immigrant youth, but it also explores universal themes which are relevant for all students regardless of their background. This story is an ideal read for elementary or early-middle school students.

This teacher's guide offers Language Arts activities that satisfy general content standards. They are suggested as initial activities on which the teacher can expand, substitute, and/or incorporate into their instruction.

COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

The following Before, During, and After Reading strategies contain activities for improving reading, writing and visual 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 addressed by each of the activities is noted in parentheses.

BEFORE READING

Write out the definition of the word “determination” on the board: n. Firmness of purpose; resolve. The write out the definition of “nostalgia” on the board: n. A bittersweet longing for persons, things, or situations of the past. Encourage students to elaborate or expand upon these definitions (Reading: word identification, using dictionary). In small groups, ask students to discuss the following prompts: What does the word determination or nostalgia mean for you?; When have you felt determined or nostalgic?; Have you faced a challenge in which you had to be determined in order to overcome? 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 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 determination or 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 cultures). Have students make predictions about the story using the cover art, back cover writing and the title (Reading: prediction, prior knowledge).

DURING READING

Assign *Mi sueño de América / My American Dream* for two different sessions (Reading: reading silently). 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 develop, to reflect on ideas, and/or to problem solve).

Session 1 – Assign Pages 1 – 29.

1. How does Yuliana respond when she first arrives in Houston? What does she think of the city? What are the differences she immediately sees between Houston and her home city of Monterrey, Mexico?
2. Where is the family going to live in Houston? How is this different from where they lived in Monterrey?
3. What does Yuliana think the first time she wakes up in her new apartment? Why do you think she is confused?
4. When school starts, what do Yuliana and her mom have to purchase? Is what they have to purchase the same in Houston as it was at home in Monterrey?
5. What does Yuliana ask her mom to do for her on the first day of school? Why? What does this tell us about Yuliana?
6. Who cooks Yuliana and her brother breakfast on the morning of the first day of school? What does this person make for them? Do Yuliana and her brother like the food?
7. Who goes to their classroom first once Yuliana and her brother get to school? How does Yuliana first react when she goes into her classroom? Is her class what she was expecting? What makes her so upset?
8. What does the teacher do first when Yuliana arrives? How do the other students respond? Does Yuliana feel welcome?
9. How does Yuliana’s first day at school go? How is her English? Can she keep up with the class? Who does Yuliana ask for help?
10. What do Alberto and Yuliana tell their mother in the car about their first day at school? What does their mother tell them to do?

Session 2 – Assign Pages 30 – 55.

1. Why doesn't Yuliana want to get out of bed on her second day of school?
2. Who encourages Yuliana not to give up? What does Yuliana decide to do on the second day of school?
3. What happens during Yuliana's second day of school? Could Yuliana understand the teacher? What does the teacher tell Yuliana to do when she doesn't understand?
4. What does Yuliana decide to do? Why does she want to be better than the other students and not just equal to them?
5. What is Yuliana's biggest achievement in school? How does she manage to do so well? Does Yuliana think she was just lucky?
6. What bad thing happened to Yuliana that made her doubt if her friends at school were really her friends?
7. Who does Yuliana decide really is her friend? Why do the girls like each other? What do they do together that makes them friends?
8. What does Shoko invite Yuliana to do with her?
9. Yuliana is confused about something before the party. What is she confused about? Why? Who helps her resolve her problem?
10. Was Yuliana surprised by the way people treated her in Houston? Why was she surprised? What was Yuliana's response to her problems?

AFTER READING

Viewing Activities:

1. Note the illustration on the cover. Why do you think this picture was chosen for the cover? What does this illustration reveal about character and plot? (Viewing: interpretation; how illustration represents meaning of text).
2. Look at the illustrations on pages 1, 18 and 43. How does the illustration show what is happening in the story at that moment? (Viewing: representation; how illustrator's choice of elements helps to represent the text's meaning).
3. Note the illustration on page 53. 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 book (Viewing: production; producing a visual to represent meaning).

Writing Activities

1. Ask students to pretend they are Yuliana. Ask them to write a letter to her cousin Sylvia detailing what life is like for her in Houston. Ask students to share their writing by reading out loud. (Writing: purposes; to express, to reflect on ideas).
2. Ask students to find the different points in the book where Yuliana talks about how she reaches success. What are the different ways that she finds to succeed? Ask students to share their writing by reading out loud. (Writing: purposes; to record, to discover).
3. Encourage students to correspond by letter or e-mail with relatives who live far away. Ask students to share their writing by reading out loud. (Writing: practical usage/connections).
4. Ask students if they have ever traveled outside of their city. Then ask if they have left their state. Finally ask if they have left the country. Spend some time talking about these visits and what they were like. Now have the students imagine that they went to live in a faraway place (it can be one of the places they mentioned or a different place). Have them imagine what life would be like in their new place. Ask them to think about whether they would stick out as different in that new place. Now have them write about what they imagined, using as many details as possible. Ask students to share their writing by reading out loud. (Writing: to discover).
5. Ask students to talk about their first day at school (whether their first day ever or their first day in a new school). How did they feel? What was it like? After discussing this for a while, have students imagine what it would be like to suddenly go to school in another country. If you have immigrant youth in your class, they can write about their own actual experiences coming to another school in a different country. If the students are not

immigrants, they can imagine what it would be like to suddenly go to school in Mexico or Japan or Egypt or Nigeria or any other country. Ask students to share their writing by reading out loud. After writing and sharing their reading, have students discuss: How can we make new members of the class feel comfortable? How can we help students from other countries or students who have moved from other parts of the United States?

CONNECTING WITH THE INTERNET/TECHNOLOGY

Kid Friendly Search Sites:

www.ajkids.com

www.kidshealth.org

www.kidinfo.com

www.yahooligans.com