**Lorenzo’s Secret Mission**

Lila and Rick Guzmán

*Curriculum Guide by Serena Mari Garcia, University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley English Department*

**Summary**:

After the death of his father, fifteen-year-old Lorenzo must make the journey from Texas to Virginia during the volatile Revolutionary War to deliver correspondence to a grandfather he has never met. Armed with only a musket, long knife and his father’s medical supplies, Lorenzo becomes embroiled with Gibson’s Lambs and Spanish supporters. While struggling with the loss of his father, betrayal and the concept of new love, Lorenzo learns a deep bravery to fight for what is right. Witnessing the horrible effects of slavery and war, Lorenzo is determined to be the man he truly wants to be – a man to make his father proud.

**About the Author:**

**Lila Guzmán** is the author of *Green Slime and Jam* (Eakin Press, 2001) and the recipient of several awards for her writing, including: Honorable Mention in Fiction and the Dorothy Daniels Honorary Writing Award from the National League of American Pen Women. **Rick Guzmán** was born in Galveston, Texas, and practices law in Austin. A former officer, he graduated from Rice University and the University of Houston Law. They live in the Hill Country area of Texas. If you would like to meet the author(s), please contact Lila at [lorenzo1776@yahoo.com](mailto:lorenzo1776@yahoo.com) with “Author Visit” as the subject line.

**Teacher Information:**

Author Lila Guzmán claims writing a “historical novel is a challenge on many levels.” However, in the age of the Internet she had “instant contact with re-enactors, historians and other experts.” Rick Guzmán describes himself as the “concept guy” who originally discovered the topic for the book and wrote the outline for the series. Working with each other sometimes presents strange conversations about characters. Lila claims their children “will be in therapy for years” after hearing discussions about how a character should meet his/her death.

**Texas State Standards:**

This curriculum guide includes activities that can help students gain knowledge and skills expected for their grade level in Texas. Relevant standards for ELAR Grade 7 include:

§110.18(1) Reading/Fluency. Students read grade-level text with fluency and comprehension. Students are expected to adjust fluency when reading aloud grade-level text based on the reading purpose and the nature of the text.

§110.18(2) Reading/Vocabulary Development. Students understand new vocabulary and use it when reading and writing. (A) Determine the meaning of grade-level academic English words derived from Latin, Greek, or other linguistic roots and affixes; (E) use a dictionary, a glossary, or a thesaurus (printed or electronic) to determine the meanings, syllabication, pronunciations, alternate word choices, and parts of speech of words.

§110.18(3) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Theme and Genre. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. (A) Implicit theme; (B) Stylistic elements; (C) Compare and contrast historical and cultural settings.

§110.18(6) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Fiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding (A) Summarize plot elements.

§110.18 (13) Reading/Media Literacy. Students use comprehension skills to analyze how words, images, graphics, and sounds work together in various forms to impact meaning. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater depth in increasingly more complex texts.

§110.18 (14) Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text.

§110.18 (26) Listening and Speaking/Listening. Students will use comprehension skills to listen attentively to others in formal and informal settings.

**Pre-reading activities:**

* Have students create word maps for “duty,” “honor” and “freedom.” Continue to add events of the novel to each appropriate category. Upon completion of the novel, ask students to present their concept maps.
* What is the longest trip you have ever been on? Describe the experience – exciting, daunting, etc. What did you and your travel companions to do pass the time?
* Have students write a letter to a long-lost relative they have never met or seen. What would you write about? Why? Have you ever dreaded meeting someone new? Who were they and why would you dread meeting them? Explain.
* Have students can read about and present mini biographies about William Linn, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, King George III, Colonel Bernardo De Gálvez and Widow de Saint Maxent, King Carlos of Spain, Gibson’s Lambs, Daniel Boone, Nathan Hale, Continental Army, Mohican, Natchez and Choctaw Indians.
* Identify the locations of importance in a Revolutionary War Era map, including: Texas, the thirteen colonies, New Orleans, Mississippi and Ohio Rivers.
* Give a mini lesson on figurative language, including: simile, metaphor, allusion, personification, flashback, euphemism, irony and imagery.
* Have students write about the bravest thing they’ve ever done. Review the concept of patriotism and dying for your country.
* Have students read historical, grade-level-appropriate descriptions of Battle of Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, the Boston Tea Party, Declaration of Independence, etc.
* “I should shoot them both for desertion and stealing military property” (94) – find relevant articles about military punishments prior to reading so students can understand the importance of following military orders.
* Review text features, such as symbols to denote time lapses, flashbacks and/or point of view change.

**Vocabulary:**

wharf (2) –

mast (3) –

mulling (8) –

trudged (8) –

covent (8) –

cathedral (8) –

tantalizing (8) –

levee (9) –

saber (11) –

oath (13) –

consolation (16) –

stature (19) –

revolution (22) –

glinted (22) –

flotilla (24) –

beneficial (24) –

scribe (25) –

haversack (25) –

musket (25) –

alight (28) –

cockeyed (28) –

aristocratic (29) –

ambassador (29) –

quinine (30) –

etiquette (32) –

scrupulously (32) –

bayonet (33) –

sentinel (37) –

swivel (37) –

solemn (39) –

gangplank (39) –

breeches (40) –

chit (41) –

scalp (44) –

sympathetic (45) –

lolled (46) –

rivulets (46) –

stupor (47) –

charity (48) –

bugle (48) –

muster (49) –

quarreled (49) –

reluctantly (50) –

prerogative (51) –

privileges (51) –

fore (53) –

aft (53) –

withering (53) –

volley (53) –

salvo (54) –

rapier (59) –

subdued (59) –

intimate (61

estranged (60

grudge (61) –

gangrene (62

hospitality (64) –

weary (64) –

disheartened (64) –

liniments (67) –

abscesses (67) –

impending (73) –

solemn (74) –

fortifying (76) –

eloped (76) –

monotony (78) –

diagnosis (79) –

consumption (79) –

tyranny (79) –

conciliatory (79) –

contrary (80) –

unnerving (83) –

pungent (84) –

aroma (84) –

sentries (85) –

inconspicuous (86) –

sauntered (68) –

remorse (95) –

offing (97) –

omen (99) –

portage (102) –

purgatory (103) –

etiquette (110) –

decipher (118) –

fortifying (119) –

grandiose (121) –

egregious (123) –

press gang (127) –

docile (127) –

involuntary (128) –

coaxed (129) –

resignation (132) –

trollop (135) –

illegitimacy (136) –

rue (136) –

mulatto (140) –

quadroon (140) –

ravenous (149) –

procure (151) –

diabolical (152) –

liaison (152) –

semblance (153) –

decorum (153) –

**Discussion Questions:**

1) How does Lorenzo change from the beginning of the book to the end? You might compare the first and last chapters of the book. What events do you think have caused him to feel, think and/or act differently by the end? Use textual evidence to support your response.

2) The letters between Eugenie and Lorenzo mean a lot to him. Have you ever gotten something in the mail that was very memorable? Have you ever mailed a letter or sent some of your drawings through postal mail? How do you think it is different to get a physical letter, compared to an electronic mail message? Can people fall in love through letters? Compare letter writing to texting and/or Internet messaging. Can people fall in love this way, too?

3) Have you ever felt the pain of betrayal? Describe what happened and what you did to resolve the issue. Put yourself in Lorenzo’s shoes; how would you feel if your grandfather betrayed you? Why is Lorenzo so concerned with his flatboat mates being captured because of him? (90)

4) After some time with the flotilla in Chapter 12, Lorenzo wants a turn at the oars. Why do you think he is willing to do the hard work of rowing upstream?

5) Relating to Lorenzo - Share a similar experience when you felt you were punished/scolded unfairly. Use the euphemism “…so I whirled around and marched away, feeling like a child leaving a woodshed” to guide your response.

6) Do you think Lorenzo’s dad is proud of him? Why or why not? Find specific examples from the reading to support your answer.

7) In Chapter 30, Lorenzo learns he is part slave and wonders how the Lambs or Eugenie will treat him. Would you have treated him differently if he were a part of your team? Why or why not?

8) What is the bravest thing you have ever done?

9) During his journey Lorenzo has to learn to let go of the past to become who he really wants to be. Who are you? What would have happened to a spy during this time? What would you be willing to fight for? What do you believe in? Prove your response with textual evidence.

10) After finding out about his past, Lorenzo must come to terms with who he is biologically and who he really is. He doesn’t understand there are “privileges of being white” (140-141); have you or anyone you know ever experienced racial or ethnic injustice? Describe the situation, who was involved, what happened, what was the event; what was the resolution, etc.

11) Would you be willing to die for your cause and/or country? Compare Calderón, who didn’t want to join the military, to Lorenzo, whose only goal is to join as soon as he turns 16. Why does each think the way they do? How hard is this line of work? Does anyone in your family work in the military? Have you ever thought about being in the military?

12) What do you think is going through Lorenzo’s head at the end of Chapter 20? Use evidence from the book to support your answer.

13) How does the flashback on page 47 help create a more intense story?

14) What does “in the family way” mean? What does “an attempt on my life” mean? What are euphemisms and how are they useful in polite society?

15) Why is keeping a log of events, especially during war, important?

16) Describe a decision in your past that you regret. How would you go back and change it? What did you learn from the event?

17) In Chapter 16, Lorenzo and William Linn spend the winter bonding. Why is this important to Lorenzo? Why does he have a need to establish these types of relationships with other men?

18) Why do you suppose Calderón hates being in the military?

19) At the beginning of Chapter 25, Lorenzo wonders about “how a man could fight for freedom, but own another human being.” What do you think? Is this a conflict or contradictory in any way? In Chapter 30, Gibson says “slaver is immoral… but it is legal” is this another contradiction or conflict? Discuss with your class what you think and feel about the morality of owning another human being.

20) Can you imagine meeting the future President of the United States? How do you think Lorenzo Bannister feels when he meets General George Washington? Use textual evidence to prove your point.

21) Though he is only fifteen, Colonel De Gálvez calls Lorenzo “a man.” Is he? What defines a man?

**Extensions:**

Writing:

1. Find poems about in-depth concepts like emotional loss, bravery, love, grief and betrayal. Have students compare and contrast the concepts from the poem to the novel.
2. Have the students secretly draw names to write as either Eugenie or Lorenzo. Then write a letter to someone in your class. Consider the purpose of your letter and plan what you want to say in the letter. Learn text features of a letter, including: date, heading, salutation, body, closure, and signature. Place the letter in an envelope and address it correctly with postage and “send” your letter to the recipient.
3. In the book, Colonel De Gálvez, William Linn, Red, Calderón and even Cincinnatus give Lorenzo wisdom about life. They each teach Lorenzo about what it means to become a man. Think of an elder that you admire. This could be a grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbor, church member, or friend of your parents. Interview the person, and ask them about lessons or ideas for how to live life.
4. Write a narrative about an experience that helped you learn a valuable lesson. Describe the characters, the events, climax and resolution of your situation.
5. Complete a Hero’s Journey Graphic Organizer for the plot elements of *Lorenzo’s Secret Mission*.
6. On page 98, Lorenzo “heals thyself.” Discuss the irony in the text and use other sources to compare the ideas.

Art Ideas:

(A) After reading the first chapter, and possibly any reading extensions, draw Lorenzo. Describe what he thinks. What does he feel? What does he see/hear?

(B) After reading the book in its entirety, redraw Lorenzo to describe how he has changed throughout the course of the year.

(C) Complete an illustration to identify all instances of figurative language in the book, including:

* Simile: “my heart pounded like a wild mustang’s hooves over the plain” (11)
* Simile: “Her skirts rustled like wind through tree branches” (26)
* Simile: “Calderon lay in the bunk just as I had left him, snoring, twitching and grunting like a man with a troubled conscience”
* Simile: “If we could go straight as a bird could fly, we’d be at the mouth of the Ohio by now.”
* Simile: “He stayed close to the general, as close as a shadow.” (113)
* Metaphor: “What a feather in his cap.” (116)
* Metaphor: “A red rage surged through me.” (123)

Literary Allusion:

1. While Lorenzo is scribe for the Captain’s Log, he writes “the threat of more attacks hangs over our head like the sword of Damocles” (56), which alludes to the constant threat faced by those in power. What power could Lorenzo be referring to? Why does he feel powerful throughout this journey? If necessary resources online.
2. After receiving a letter from Eugenie, Lorenzo thinks of Benjamin Franklin’s words “We must all hang together, or assuredly we will hang separately” (72). Though there is a literal interpretation that Lorenzo is aware of, what is the metaphorical significance of the phrase?
3. There is also a historical allusion to Paul Revere on page 96; why is this important during this era?
4. “I would serve tea… but nowadays, it’s unpatriotic” (117) references the Boston Tea Party. Explain the importance of this event during the Revolutionary War.
5. “I fear slavery will tear this country apart” (147) is an allusion to what future war?

**Further reading:**

* Historical Fiction – Revolutionary War Era
  + *Sargent Lamb’s America* by Robert Graves
  + *My Brother Sam is Dead* by Christopher and James Lincoln Collier
  + *The Fifth of March: A Story of the Boston Massacre* by Ann Rinaldi

**Related Media:**

* Gibson’s Lambs Website –

<http://www.irishculturalsociety.com/essaysandmisc/texasintheAmericanRevolution.html>

* School House Rock. “Shot heard round the World.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZMmPWTwTHc>
* PBS. “The Road to Revolution Game.” <http://www.pbs.org/ktca/liberty/road.html>