

## ***Who's Buried In the Garden?***

Author Ray Villareal

Publisher Piñata Books, an Imprint of Arte Público Press, University of Houston  
Guide by Danielle Lopez, UT Rio Grande Valley, Mexican American Studies Program

### **Synopsis/Summary:**

Seventh grader Joshua knows that his best friend Artie Mendoza is the biggest liar in all of Marsville Middle School. Joshua knows Artie is up to the same old tricks when Artie claims Mrs. Foley killed her husband and has buried him under her flowerbed in the back yard. Now Artie and their friend Wolf Man are creating a master plan to dig up the corpse and become famous for exposing Mrs. Foley's crime. Joshua must decide if he will assist his best friend and be part of solving the neighborhood mystery. Otherwise, Joshua will be in big trouble if Artie is wrong again. The surprising solution to *Who's Buried in the Garden?* may make you laugh!

### **Teacher Information / Background Knowledge:**

Build students' knowledge by discussing who Sally Ride, Eileen Collins, and Shannon Lucid are before reading this novel. The work of astronauts could be discussed, and pictures of real moon rocks could be displayed so students can visualize them when they read about these things.

You may also wish to discuss the performer Selena Quintanilla, who is mentioned in the text. Some students may know her music, dancing, fashion, and tragic death on March 31, 1995; however, what they may not know is the many historical contributions she made. Selena was the first Tejano artist to win a Grammy Award. Selena was named by Billboard Magazine as the Best Selling Latin Artist of the Decade (90s), selling approximately 18,000,000 albums. Selena was named the fastest selling female artist in history in 1995, when her album *Dreaming Of You* sold well over 175,000 copies its first day. Selena broke Mariah Carey's sales record. Selena's *Dreaming of You* sold in one day what Mariah's CD sold in one week. Selena was the first Latin artist to chart a Latin album (at least 50% Spanish) at #1 on the Billboard 200 Pop Charts. Selena's 1994 album *Amor Prohibido* sold over 5,000,000 copies. Selena's 1993 Grammy-winning album *Live* has sold over 1,500,000 copies. *All My Hits – Todos Mis Exitos* made up 50% of EMI Latin's sales in 1999. Selena spent more weeks at number 1 for 78 weeks, which beats Gloria Estefan's 58 weeks. Most importantly, Selena was an advocate of education, participating in many school public appearances where she spoke with students about the importance of staying in school. In 1993, Selena gave a free concert for Texas students who met their goal to drastically improve their grades, and she donated \$2,500 to school programs. She was a spokesperson for the early drug prevention program D.A.R.E (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) and a battered women's hotline. Selena's community services were remembered on April 8, 1994 in Houston where their mayor proclaimed it "Selena Quintanilla Day."

### **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 4 (b) Knowledge and skills include the following.

(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. Students are expected to:

- A) Summarize and explain the lesson or message of a work of fiction as its theme; and
- (B) compare and contrast the adventures or exploits of characters (e.g., the trickster) in traditional and classical literature.

(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. Students are expected to:

(A) Sequence and summarize the plot's main events and explain their influence on future events;

(B) Describe the interaction of characters including their relationships and the changes they undergo; and

(C) Identify whether the narrator or speaker of a story is first or third person.

(8) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Sensory Language. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about how an author's sensory language creates imagery in literary text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to evaluate the impact of sensory details, imagery, and figurative language in literary text.

(9) Reading/Comprehension of Text/Independent Reading. Students read independently for sustained periods of time and produce evidence of their reading. Students are expected to read independently for a sustained period of time and summarize or paraphrase what the reading was about, maintaining meaning and logical order (e.g., generate a reading log or journal; participate in book talks).

(10) Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to draw conclusions from the information presented by an author and evaluate how well the author's purpose was achieved.

(15) Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text. Students are expected to:

(A) plan a first draft by selecting a genre appropriate for conveying the intended meaning to an audience, determining appropriate topics through a range of strategies (e.g., discussion, background reading, personal interests, interviews), and developing a thesis or controlling idea;

(B) Develop drafts by choosing an appropriate organizational strategy (e.g., sequence of events, cause-effect, and compare-contrast) and building on ideas to create a focused, organized, and coherent piece of writing;

(C) revise drafts to clarify meaning, enhance style, include simple and compound sentences, and improve transitions by adding, deleting, combining, and rearranging sentences or larger units of text after rethinking how well questions of purpose, audience, and genre have been addressed;

(D) Edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling; and

(E) Revise final draft in response to feedback from peers and teacher and publish written work for appropriate audiences.

(11) Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Expository Text. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about expository text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

(A) Summarize the main ideas and supporting details in a text in ways that maintain meaning and logical order;

(B) Determine the facts in text and verify them through established methods;

(C) Analyze how the organizational pattern of a text (e.g., cause-and-effect, compare-and-contrast, sequential order, logical order, classification schemes) influences the relationships among the ideas;

(D) Use multiple text features and graphics to gain an overview of the contents of text and to locate information; and

(E) Synthesize and make logical connections between ideas within a text and across two or three texts representing similar or different genres.

(24) Research/Gathering Sources. Students determine, locate, and explore the full range of relevant sources addressing a research question and systematically record the information they gather. Students are expected to:

(A) Follow the research plan to collect data from a range of print and electronic resources (e.g., reference texts, periodicals, web pages, online sources) and data from experts;

(B) Differentiate between primary and secondary sources;

(C) Record data, utilizing available technology (e.g., word processors) in order to see the relationships between ideas, and convert graphic/visual data (e.g., charts, diagrams, timelines) into written notes;

(D) Identify the source of notes (e.g., author, title, page number) and record bibliographic information concerning those sources according to a standard format; and

(E) Differentiate between paraphrasing and plagiarism and identify the importance of citing valid and reliable sources.

**Reading comprehension strategies (before, during, and after reading):**

**Before** – Tell stories of La Llorona & Narcissus to build students’ knowledge. The author makes a connection in the novel with the version of this tale by Joshua’s mother (see page 52). She says the man who betrayed La Llorona was selfish, and Joshua mentions he sounds like Narcissus from Greek Mythology. The Classical Greek literature connection validates the story of La Llorona having as much cultural importance as a classical Greek narrative. Ask the students how they feel about having the traditional stories and folktales considered as valuable as classical literature. Have the students write their thought on whether it is important to them to hear their cultural traditional stories and know the stories are valued. Or, because both stories tell a great moral lesson in humility and kindness, have the students focus on writing about why it is worthwhile to teach people to be humble and kind.

**During** – The friendship of Joshua and Artie is in some rocky times. Joshua is slowly coming to a conclusion that Artie is not a real friend. Although Joshua feels attached to Artie since they have been friends since a younger age, he can’t help but see Artie is a real troublemaker. However, Joshua is doing his best to save their friendship by keeping the secret of

Artie's latest fiasco to himself. How can you tell that Joshua is changing? What do you predict will happen next (after page 72)?

**After** – Thankfully, the mystery is solved and in a good way! Did you expect that type of ending for the novel? What ending had you predicted for the end of the story? What other alternate ending can you imagine? Do you have dreams to be an astronaut? Do you enjoy science studies (page 78)?

**Writing/composition prompts:**

- Joshua has had rich life lessons throughout the novel. His experiences may have taught you about what to do in moments regarding a tough decision. Did you ever have to tell the truth about someone because you knew it was the right thing, but you were afraid how it would affect the relationship you had with that person? Perhaps you knew your friend was going to make a really bad decision, and you knew telling a grown up you trusted might help save that friend. We all have a childhood friend who may or may not be the best company at some point in our life. In reading about Joshua's lessons with his friends Lorena, Wolf Man, and Artie, we can see many things going on that are both positive and negative. Thinking about the up and downs in Joshua's life, write at least four sentences about the lesson of friendship you learned from this novel (Page 79).
- Many things are happening in this novel; there is a mystery about a buried body, friendships are won and lost, biography reports are due, and characters must grow and make responsible choices on your own. In looking back at all this excitement write four sentences to summarize what you see as the most important or interesting conflict in the book.
- When we are growing up, we hope to make many friends, and many people will walk into our lives. We are meant to meet people so we can learn from them. Sometimes we have best friends, but may grow outgrow some of these friendships. Think of the wonderful examples of good or bad friendship in the novel. Think of how some of the stories in one of the chapters of the book may reflect an experience of your own. Remembering all these aspects of friendship, write about friendship in the book, and compare this portrayal to your own views on friendship.
- The novel talks about many important and celebrated people including Albert Einstein, Sally Ride, and Andy Warhol. Why do you think it is important to know these historic people? Do you believe everyone has something important to achieve even if they do not become famous?
- The novel mentions wonderful things you can remember or create with your mind by showing the depths of Joshua's imagination on pages 84-85. Do you use your imagination like Joshua does? What amazing stories can you create with your mind and imagination?
- Write a letter to Joshua in which you persuade him to act differently with Artie. Tell why.

**Vocabulary:**

Astronaut (4) – a person who is trained to travel in a spacecraft.

Cavernous (15) – giving an impression of vast, dark depths like a cave.

Grimacing (17) – frowning

Perspiration (17) – the process of sweating.

Burrowed (17) – made a hole or tunnel.

Dilemma (26) – a situation in which you have to make a difficult choice.  
 Revenge (29) – the action of inflicting harm for a wrong done; vengeance.  
 Reluctantly (32) – to act with hesitation, doubt, or dread.  
 Reprimand (32) – to rebuke or criticize.  
 Dully (35) – not lively or spirited; listless.  
 Liable (45) – responsible by law; legally answerable.  
 Mischievous (46) – naughty, badly behaved, disobedient, troublesome.  
 Glee (46) – great delight.  
 Indignities (56) – embarrassing and unfair circumstances.  
 Reprieve (65) – to postpone punishment.  
 Indication (68) – a piece of information that shows something.  
 Oblivious (70) – to be unaware of what is happening around one self; clueless.  
 Mulling (71) – thinking deeply; contemplating.  
 Bizarre (72) – strange or unusual, especially to cause interest or surprise.  
 Staunchly (81) – to act with firm decision, bravery, or strength.  
 Feign (98) – to simulate, fake, or pretend.  
 Interjected (110) – to say something abruptly as an interruption.  
 Resignation (110) – the acceptance of something undesirable but inevitable.  
 Stealthily (119) – done in secret, or in a manner designed not to attract notice.  
 Omitted (123) – left out or excluded.

### **Discussion questions:**

- 1) How does Joshua change by the end? What makes him develop?
- 2) How do you feel about Joshua's voice telling the story?
- 3) How would the book have been different if Wolf Man or Lorena told the story?
- 4) Joshua tries to seek advice from his mother and from his teacher Mr. Cortés. What would you do if you were in the same situation as Joshua? Would you seek the help of an adult if your best friend thought they knew where a dead body was buried?
- 5) There is talk about the exciting ghost story of La Llorona in Chapter 10. Do you and your family have a haunted story you love to share and re-tell to each other?
- 6) Do you think other cultures have a ghost story like the Llorona? Have you heard of any?
- 7) Joshua talks about how he feels for not knowing much Spanish like his parents on page 62. Have you ever felt the way Joshua does?
- 8) Joshua's dad explains to Joshua that the reason he and Joshua's Mother may not have taught him much Spanish is because they didn't want Joshua to struggle in school like they did. Do your parents share the same story as Joshua's parents? Or did your parents teach you Spanish? If yes, how does being bilingual help you? If not, do you want to learn Spanish?
- 9) The novel mentions some exciting cultural information about dance, music, and song. What cultural treasures do you and your family share?
- 10) Joshua has questions about Mrs. Foley's feelings about her husband's death. How do you feel about discussing the passing of loved ones? How does your family respond to loss? Does your family honor a passed loved one?

### **Extensions/Activities:**

- 1) Artie may be a fabricator of tales. He managed to make Wolf Man believe he sold him an "authentic" lucky moon rock (4). However, moon rocks are very real and an interesting way to

introduce your students to STEM studies by collaborating with your science teacher for an astronaut scavenger hunt. Make it a family activity where students can invite parents to see their “findings” from the hunt including fantastic model moon rocks, stars, and other antimatter. The students imagination will be sparked by their hands on activity of the scavenger hunt and help them to further explore the possible future adventures they can have if they so choose a career in STEM. Also, this activity may produce a possible school support for an in-depth science trip to a local planetarium if your local district supports young STEM interests.

2) The study of language is important, and Joshua fully feels the emptiness of not knowing his mother tongue. He even talks to his parents about learning more Spanish (13, 14). Engage your students into discussing their thoughts on learning a second language or practicing their bilingualism with other students so that they can pick up exciting new vocabulary. Perhaps you are bilingual or know another language and could teach some intermediate words to your students. Joshua was introduced to the French language by his father in the book. Consider a collaborative lesson with your school’s Spanish language teacher. If you have Hispanic students in the class room who don’t speak Spanish but want to learn, like Joshua, talk to the students and how they have felt about not knowing Spanish and whether they can give some time to learning.

3) Creating arts and crafts for Día de los Muertos will be culturally one way for responding to death for your students. It is reflecting on the rich celebration of life of a loved one (8). Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, is a Mexican holiday in November in which people pay tribute to deceased family members and other loved ones. Many people celebrate this holiday by building an altar in memory of their loved ones. Pictures of deceased friends and family, candles, toys, and other mementos, as well as religious artifacts, are common elements of most Día de los Muertos altars. Build your own version of this Mexican tradition with your students and teach them about the traditions of other cultures and your own family’s ancestors. In the Related Media/literary tools, included websites have additional appropriate grade level learning content info, activities, crafts, virtual games, and printable reading lists for books.

***What You Need:***

Pictures of family members and other loved ones (for students this may include heroes like Selena, Cesar Chavez, Maya Angelou). Additional Decorations - smiling skeletons (no scary ones), Pan de Muerto (pan dulce will do fine), marigolds, candles (optional), \*for class room setting inexpensive LED imitation candles work, sugar skulls, rebozo for table cloth. Also, put the student’s crafts up if completed. Search online or in books for photos of Día de los Muertos altars to help your students visualize what you are going to create and initiate a discussion about happy memories of lost loved ones. Designate a place in your room for the altar. It should be visible but not in the way so as to not damage a precious photo frame or breakable art pieces. Copy/Xerox Photos of deceased family members/loved ones and place them on the altar area. Add decorations of your choice. Discuss with your students what types of things would be most fitting to honor these loved ones. Traditional items include candles, flowers, toys, foods, and other symbolic offerings, but feel free to personalize your altar to your family’s preferences. Spend time as a community talking about the people in your altar pictures—who they were, what they did, and how they were important to your family. Allow everyone to share memories or stories they may have of the deceased. For those who want to take this activity further, possible add-on activities include writing a collection of stories or memories that were shared, and participating in other Día de los Muertos traditions, such as baking Pan de Muerto (Bread of the Dead). Talking about burial traditions introduces discussion of Día de los Muertos. Possibly hold

an in- class showing filming of *The Book of Life*, an animated film, to discuss how the nurturing of traditions of burial and remembering of loved ones is essential to understanding.

### **About the Author:**

Ray Villareal received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Education from Southern Methodist University in 1981 with an emphasis in Bilingual Education. Ten years later he completed his Masters of Liberal Arts degree in 1991 from the same university. He is the author of six novels for the young adolescent Latino audience: *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, *Alamo Wars* (2008), *Who's Buried in the Garden?* (Piñata Books, 2009), winner of LAUSD's Westchester Fiction Award, *Don't Call Me Hero* (Piñata Books, 2011), *Body Slammed!* (Piñata Books, 2012), and his latest book *On the Other Side of the Bridge* (2014), which explores difficult subjects including the death of a parent and homelessness.

In addition to novels, Ray Villareal has written and directed a number of children's plays. His inspiration to write literature came from the reluctant readers in his former sixth grade class. Villareal realized the students needed literature that reflected their lives; this would be content that would introduce Latino students into a world of reading and learning.

Villareal worked for 30 years as a teacher and an instructional reading coach with the Dallas Independent School District. Kirkus Reviews praised Villareal in the 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." Villareal lives with his wife Sylvia and their children Ana and Mateo in Dallas, Texas.

### **Related Media:**

Smithsonian Latino Center Day of the Dead: Día de los Muertos:  
[http://latino.si.edu/DayoftheDead/Dia\\_de\\_los\\_Muertos\\_for\\_6-8.pdf](http://latino.si.edu/DayoftheDead/Dia_de_los_Muertos_for_6-8.pdf)

Fun Arts & Crafts for Día de los Muertos Y Mas:  
<http://www.craftychica.com/category/blog/occasions/dia-de-los-muertos>

Ray Villareal holds resources for teachers who continue to enjoy polishing their writing with his website: <http://marsvilewritingproject.com> – A meat and potatoes approach to teaching writing.

Information about author Ray Villareal:  
<https://artepublicopress.com/blog/ray-villareal/#sthash.6jwWKqEW.dpuf>

For more information to kick start a NASA style STEM fair for your students, check:  
<http://mynasadata.larc.nasa.gov/lesson-plans/lesson-plans-middle-school-educators>

"Moon rocks" Math, Science, & Group activities can be found Lunar and Planetary Institute.  
<http://www.lpi.usra.edu/education/lprp/content/teachers/g5-8/curriculum.html>

### **Further Reading:**

For another novelist whose forte is in youth literature, consider author Xavier Garza with his book entitled *Kid Cyclone Fights the Devil and Other Stories*, with a collection of 14 short

stories at 6-7 pages or less. Also, Garza's novels about fifth-grader Maximilian include Maximilian and the *Mystery of the Guardian Angel*, a *Bilingual Lucha Libre Thriller* and *Maximilian and the Bingo Rematch*, A *Lucha Libre Sequel*.

Readers who liked the suspense of this novel would also love the three books in René Saldaña's Mickey Rangel series: *The Case of the Pen Gone Missing: A Mickey Rangel Mystery / El caso de la pluma perdida*, *colección Mickey Rangel, detective privado* (2009), *The Lemon Tree Caper: A Mickey Rangel Mystery / La intriga del limonero: Colección Mickey Rangel, detective privado* (2011), and *The Mystery of the Mysterious Marker, a Mickey Rangel Mystery / El misterio del malvado marcador, colección Mickey Rangel, detective privado* (2013).

For more advanced readers, consider *My Father, the Angel of Death* and *Body Slammed*, also by Ray Villareal. In *My Father the Angel of Death* one of the most popular wrestlers on Monday Night Mayhem is also Mark Baron, Jesse Baron's father. Jesse has just started at yet another new school, this time in San Antonio, and he dreads the moment when the other kids in his seventh-grade class learn who his father is. The reaction will be the same as it was in Omaha, Atlanta, Tampa, St. Louis, and all the other cities he has lived in. They will want to be his "friend" not because they like him, but because they are obsessed with the Angel of Death. In *Body Slammed*, sixteen-year-old Jesse Baron feels like he's living his life on the sidelines. Jesse is fed up with being cut down and dismissed, whether by the coach or his friends. If only he was bigger, tougher and more athletic, like his dad.

A recommended book particularly for tween girls is *Ask My Mood Ring How I Feel* by Diana López. Its summer before eighth grade in San Antonio, and Erica "Chia" Montenegro is feeling so many things that she needs a mood ring to keep track of her emotions. When Erica's mom is diagnosed with breast cancer, she feels worried and doesn't know what she can do to help. When her family visits a *cuarto de milagros*, a miracle room in a famous church, Erica decides to make a *promesa* to God in exchange for her mom's health.