

Always Running

Luis Rodriguez

Teacher's Guide

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Synopsis

Chapter One

The author, nicknamed Grillo (grasshopper), recalls his feelings at age nine when his parents come close to parting. His mother, María Estela, chooses to remain in Los Angeles rather than return with her two sons and two daughters to Juárez, Mexico. The family fortunes declined after Alfonso Rodriguez lost his job and status as school principal. He marries his secretary and sires José René "Rano" Rodriguez. While in Mexico, Alfonso goes to prison for allegedly stealing school funds. As a result of the disastrous turn of events, the family flees to Los Angeles and settles in Watts. Luis's mother feels like an outsider because she speaks little English.

Luis's brother José becomes a feisty troublemaker. When the two boys venture to a South Gate grocery store, white youths beat José severely. He forces Luis to conceal the assault from their parents. At age six, Luis attends the 109th Street School, where a teacher rejects him. His mother forces him to play with Earl. The round of evictions and unpaid utilities ends briefly after Alfonso begins teaching temporarily at Taft High School in the San Fernando Valley and buys a house in Reseda. When the job ends, the family moves in with Seni, Luis's half-sister, and their grandmother Catita until family violence forces the Rodriguezes on the street.

Chapter Two

Tino and Luis get into trouble with the sheriff's department for climbing the fence to play ball at the school after hours. Tino dies in a fall from the cafeteria roof. The family moves to South San Gabriel, a haven of crime, where Luis is a founding member of Thee Impersonations. Alfonso works as a lab technician while Luis attends Richard Garvey

middle school and flirts with Elena, Socorro, and Marina, who influences him to get a cross tattoo. Alfonso and María Estela combat Luis's interest in sex and gangs. Mrs. Snelling begins to cultivate José's talents. Luis feels isolated by his lack of skill at sports and fighting, yet he risks a serious fracas with two punks to protect José. Luis and four others form the Animal Tribe.

Chapter Three

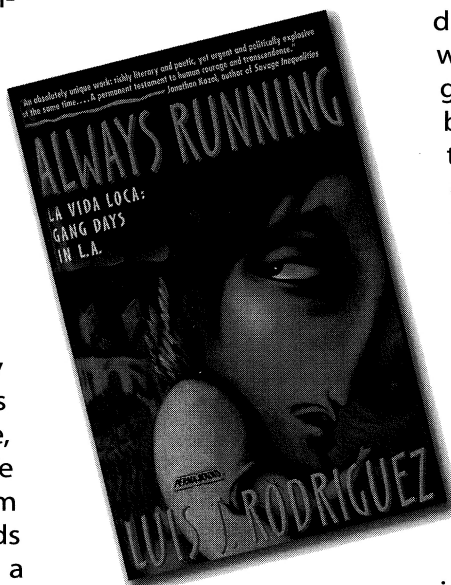
The Animal Tribe defaces walls and assembles in the ruins of an old house to drink wine. Sangra hoodlums attack with automatic weapons and a shotgun, striking Clavo in the face and blinding him in one eye. More relatives immigrate, including Luis's eccentric Tía Chucha. Cousin Pancho teaches Luis and José to dance. While pumping weights with Pancho, Luis suffers a rupture and a subsequent botched circumcision. The family relaxes at Marrano Beach. The Animal Tribe invades Huntington Beach, where Luis admires Hermie Acuña. Police arrest the group for possession of beer, marijuana, and mescaline.

Black Dog is incarcerated at a juvenile hall. Luis gets a route delivering the Post-Advocate and works at a car wash. Tío Kiko treats Luis's feet for fungus, which he gets because he stands in water-soaked shoes all day.

Yuk Yuk initiates organized theft from grocery stores, a record shop, malls, homes, and service stations. Jandro Mares supervises the group's car thefts; Shed Cowager buys electronics, bikes, and guns. Yuk Yuk instructs the gang on armed robberies at truck stops and forces Luis to rob the concession stand at a drive-in movie. The gang flees amid gunfire.

Chapter Four

The next day, in exile in the garage, Luis tries to kill himself with liquor, pills, and aerosol cans. He chooses not to slit his wrists. He wanders the streets



with other homeless people and winos until his mother allows him back in the garage. At Mark Keppel High School, he enters classes for low IQ students and chooses to be an outlaw. He buys a saxophone. The Animal Tribe starts a band, Thee Occasions. José stomps the saxophone.

At Fiesta Day, Luis meets Viviana and climbs to a roof with her. Below, a fight breaks out with the Sangra. Luis and his gang rob whites at a football game. Police brutalize Carlitos. A riot ensues. The gang returns to the stands and halts the game. An Asian guy tries to reason with the Latinos. A white holds a gun on Luis. The violence continues at school. Police target only Mexican participants. After being expelled from high school, Luis sniffs aerosol fumes. He dates Wilo's sister Payasa, who is crazed on sniffing and drugs.

Chapter Five

After the murder of John Fabela, the Animal Tribe founders. A party at Nina's house gets out of control. A brutal initiation precedes Luis's entry into the Lomas gang. Puppet forces Luis to stab an innocent man with a rusty screwdriver. At age 16, Luis yearns for change. He takes karate lessons at the community center. After the shooting death of Little Man, the gang takes Luis to Chava's house to toss fire bombs. At a dance, Sangra girls shoot at Luis's sister Gloria.

Death seems to stalk Luis. Rape becomes a common felony. Wilo is murdered at age 15. Luis and Chicharrón cruise other neighborhoods for girls and abuse drugs and liquor. They form relationships with Shoshi and Roberta, both of whom are prostitutes. In grief over being tricked, Luis begins shooting drugs.

Chapter Six

María Estela asks Mr. Rothro, a former elementary school principal, to counsel Luis, who begins writing a book. Because Luis lasts only a week at Continuation High School, Alfonso transports him to Taft High School. Luis is forced into shop classes and learns to melt lead for a Linotype and to tune auto engines. At Pierce College, where Alfonso maintains the biology labs, Luis reads in the library the works of Claude Brown, Eldridge Cleaver, Le Roi Jones, and Malcolm X. Luis joins Edwin in breaking into houses.

Luis goes back on the streets in 1970 and begins reading verse at the library. After Luis tries to leave

a restaurant without paying for his food, Charles Kearney apprehends him and calls the sheriff. Chente enlists Luis for the Neighborhood Youth Corps and urges him to return to school. Luis learns boxing. An armed robbery goes wrong, concluding with the deaths of Daddio and Yuk Yuk in a car accident. Luis collapses at a community center meeting from taking drugs. Chente forces him to make a choice to abandon drugs.

Chapter Seven

On August 29, 1970, Luis protests the Vietnam War. At Laguna Park, a deputy hits Luis with a baton. Luis travels by bus to the Los Angeles County Jail and takes a cell next to that of Charles Manson. María Estela takes Luis home. He reunites with Viviana at a Catholic church dance, but loses her. A meeting of students with Mr. Madison proposes improvements to Keppel High School. Luis joins Esme in an Aztec dance that ends in their becoming the school mascots. He organizes a school walkout and demands a class in Chicano history and culture. Fernando Luna hangs himself. A standoff against bikers sends Luis out at 2:30 A.M. after a rifle and scope from Roger Nelson. The San Gabriel police arrest Luis for assault with intent to commit murder.

Chapter Eight

María Estela leaves Luis in jail, where he trades insults with a Sangra named Night Owl. Chente visits. After Luis's release, he offers his verse, stories, and vignettes to Mrs. Baez. The police charge Roger Nelson, an innocent man. At the trial, Luis testifies for Roger, who admits that the Sinisters hold a grudge against the family. The jury exonerates Roger. Police and business owners meet to discuss community violence. Chente advocates jobs for youth. Cuervo joins Luis in trying to end the killings. Cokie is brutally raped and murdered. Dances and athletic games promote peace. Luis romances Delfina. Chente enlists Luis on a mural project for the city of Rosemead and gives him a book on Mexican murals.

Police shoot Miguel Robles, who had abandoned gang violence. The Lomas and Sangra declare a truce. Miguel dies of his injuries. Deputy Coates is charged with murder of an unarmed man. A gunshot strikes a police helicopter. A drive-by shooter kills Indio and Santos and breaks the truce. Puppet superintends a gathering of gangsters. He strikes Luis for recommending peace over vengeance.

Chapter Nine

At a party, Chava is victimized. Luis defends Cha Cha from the history teacher, Mr. Humes, who calls her a whore. Racial fights resume. A doctor sews up Luis's cut lip. Mr. Pérez, the print shop teacher, is abruptly fired. Luis abandons his stance as peacekeeper. To forestall a confrontation, the principal calls an afternoon assembly. Mrs. Baez advises Luis to publish his writing. He gets an offer from California State College and wins \$250 and a trip to Berkeley as a prize for a literary contest.

In 1972, Luis enters California State College to major in broadcast journalism and Chicano studies. Luis falls in love with Camila Martínez. Terry claims that Luis fathered her child. He urges her to get an abortion. She disappears. A shootout kills a Sangra, David Alcón. Tiburón is charged and jailed at San Quentin. Chicharrón is charged with accessory to murder and sent to prison. After Luis intervenes in

police brutality against Licha Rubalcava, officers arrest and pummel him. Luis urges Licha not to kill herself. After making bail, he has a brief affair with her.

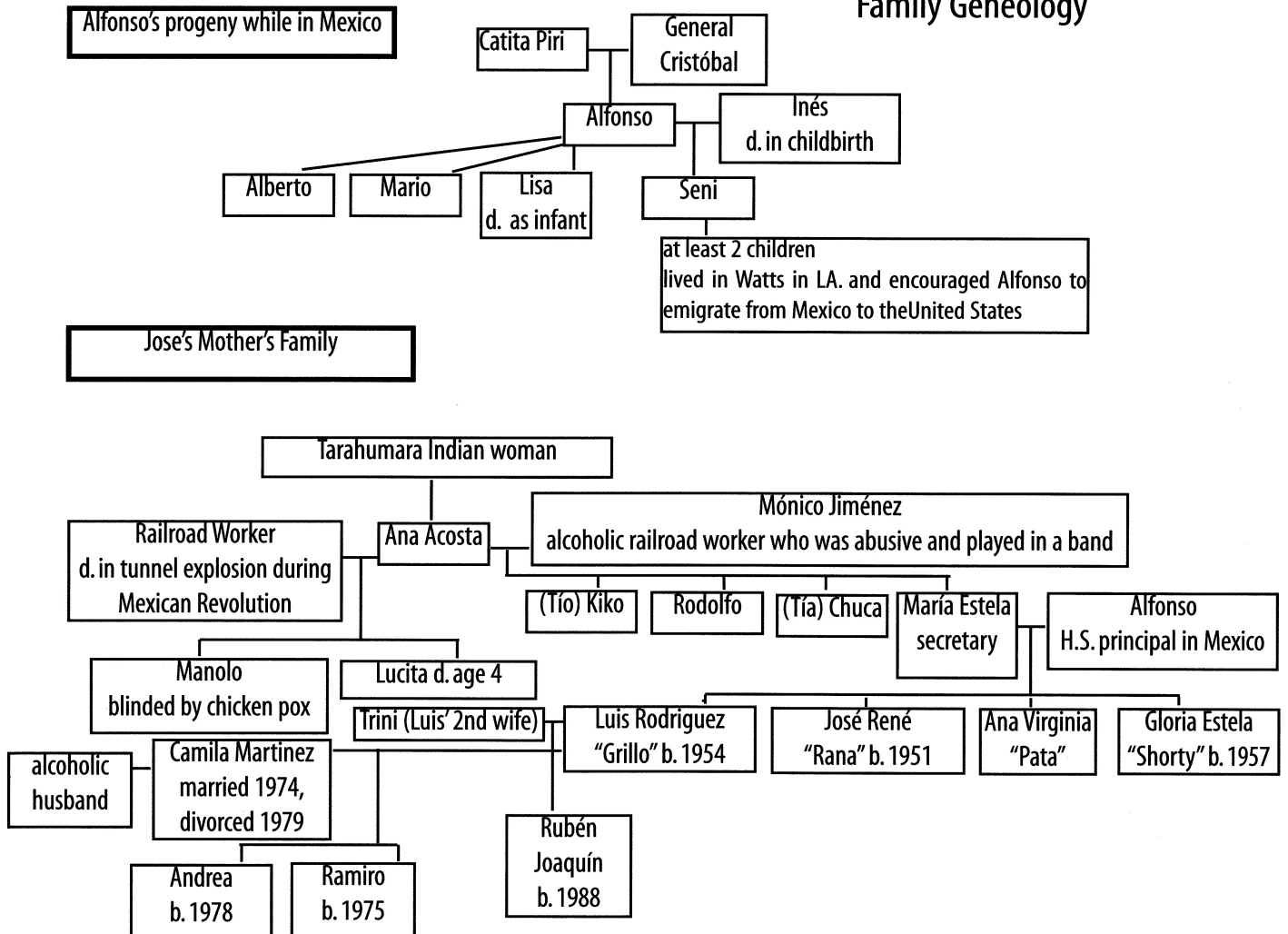
Chapter 10

After abandoning college, Luis works in a paper factory. Chente urges him to end turf battles. Luis's friends try to kill him. Change grips the neighborhood as PCP kills young users and Asians move into the ghetto. Luis goes to Chicago and returns to California to work in construction and industry. At age 20, he marries Camila. Chava accuses him of assault. Luis advises her to abandon revenge.

Epilogue

The change in jobs from mechanical to electronics costs jobs that Los Angeles Hispanics rely on. Gang activity declines. Luis explains that gangs flourish in a crumbling social order.

Family Genealogy

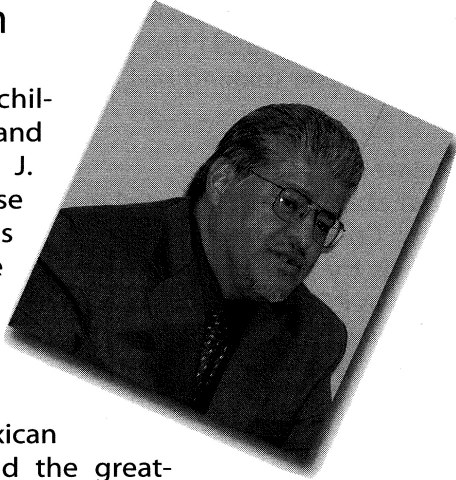


Author Sketch

A memoirist, children's author, and poet, Luis J. Rodriguez chose to document his coming of age among gangs in East Los Angeles, California.

The son of Mexican immigrants and the great-grandson of a Tarahumara Indian, he was born in El Paso, Texas, in 1954 and came to Los Angeles at age two. In 1962, the family settled in a barrio in the San Gabriel Valley. For over a decade, Luis was involved in gang warfare, drug use, and petty crime—assault on a police officer, attempted murder, fighting, theft, and rioting. In 1969, he quit school, lived on the streets, and returned to the family garage. He joined anti-Vietnam War demonstrations. After completing high school, in 1972, he studied at California State College and organized a student rescue movement in East Los Angeles high schools. The effort ended when he was sentenced to prison for heroin use. Supporters convinced a judge to lower the sentence to confinement in the county jail.

Rodriguez wrote verse while working at bus driving, carpentry, construction, warehouse and custodial jobs, foundry and refinery labor, and truck driving. From night classes at East Los Angeles Community College, at age 26, he began reporting and photographing for local newspapers. In 1980, he joined the staff of the *San Bernardino Sun*. He extended his benevolent outreach to prisons, immigrant labor camps, homeless shelters, and juvenile halls. In 1985, he settled in Chicago to edit *People's Tribune*. He married his wife Trini and returned to California to open a bookstore, Tía Chucha's Café Cultural. He has published in the *American Poetry Review*, *Bello*, *Chicago Tribune*, *English Journal*, *Grand Street*, *L. A. Weekly*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Nation*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Prison Life*, *Progressive*, *Rock and Rap Confidential*, *Roots*, *San Jose Mercury*, *Speakeasy*, *U. S. News & World Report*, and *Utne Reader*. In August 1995, he delivered the keynote speech at the Network of Educators on the Americas in Washington, D. C.



Critic's Corner

The ordeals of Luis Rodriguez were intended as a caution to the author's 15-year-old son Ramiro. The memoir impressed reviewers with its vigor and candor, a source of book banning in Rockford, Illinois, public schools in September 1996 after a complaint by school board member Ed Sharp. Publisher Sandy Taylor riposted that the memoir is read in 40 high schools nationwide: "We've received more letters from young people thanking us for this book than we have for any other book we've ever done." Other censorings of the author's work happened in California, Illinois, Michigan, and Texas. Of rejections of raw realism, Rodriguez stated, "I'm afraid that if you ban this book, then any book with any relevance for young people is up for grabs. Multicultural literature has become a target." Despite censorship, the author won a Carl Sandburg Literary Arts Award for Nonfiction, Poetry Center Book Award, Joseph Miles Literary Award, Silver Book Award from *Foreword* magazine, citation from *Parent's Choice*, *Chicago Sun-Times* Award, *New York Times* Notable book, and two Skipping Stones nominations. He extends his celebrity to young Latino writers, whom he publishes through Tía Chucha Press, an effort by the Chicago Guild Complex.

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Rodriguez's Published Works

- Poems across the Pavement*, 1989
- The Concrete River*, 1991
- Always Running*, 1993
- In Their Own Voices* (contributor), 1996
- Letters of a Nation* (contributor), 1997
- Trochemoche*, 1998
- America Is Her Name*, 1998
- Las Christmas* (contributor), 1998
- East Side Stories* (contributor), 1998
- From Earth to Sky* (contributor), 1998
- It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*, 1999
- Outlaw Bible of American Poetry* (contributor), 1999
- Bum Rush the Page* (contributor), 2001
- Hearts and Hands*, 2001
- My Name's Not Rodriguez*, 2002
- The Republic of East L. A.*, 2002
- Poetics of Peace* (contributor), 2003
- Writing on the Edge* (contributor), 2003
- Other Voices* (contributor), 2004
- Tongue Tied* (contributor), 2004
- Approaching Literature in the 21st Century* (contributor), 2004
- Some of My Best Friends* (contributor), 2004
- Music of the Mill*, 2005
- Language!* (contributor), 2005
- Red Hot Salsa* (contributor), 2005
- My Nature Is Hunger*, 2005

Timeline of Events

- 1771** Father Junípero Serra founds San Gabriel Mission.
- 1951** José René Rodriguez is born.
Cousin Pancho is born.
- 1954** Luis Rodriguez is born in El Paso, Texas.
- 1956** The Rodriguez family emigrate from Juárez, Mexico, to Los Angeles.
- 1957** José is assigned to a class for retarded children.
Gloria "Shorty" Rodriguez is born.
- 1960** Luis is rejected at the 109th Street School.
- Nov. 1963** María Estela chooses not to leave Alfonso Rodriguez.
Luis looks for cleaning jobs in Alhambra.
- 1964** Tino dies in a fall.
- 1965** Luis pledges with four others to form Thee Impersonations.
- Aug. 13-17** The Watts Riot impacts the civil rights movement.
- 1966** Luis discovers girls and gets a paper route. He addicts himself to liquor and drugs.
- 1967** Luis co-founds the Animal Tribe and works with José at a car wash.
- 1968** Luis plays the saxophone.
- 1969** He works as a restaurant bus boy.
- 1970** He longs to escape violence. He leaves Taft High School during the teacher's strike.
- Aug. 29** Luis protests the Vietnam War and goes to jail.
A total of 25 of Luis's friends have died.
He studies journalism at California State College.
- 1973** After getting out of jail, he quits college and works for a paper company.
- 1974** He weds Camila Martínez.
- 1975** Ramiro Rodriguez is born to Camila and Luis Rodriguez.
- 1978** Andrea Rodriguez is born.
- 1979** Luis divorces Camila Rodriguez.
- 1988** Rubén Joaquín is born to Luis and Trini Rodriguez.
- winter** Ramiro's behavior declines from involvement in Chicago gangs.
- 1991** Gang violence and drugs kill 600 Los Angeles youth.
- 1991** Ramiro receives psychiatric counseling.

General Objectives

1. To understand the impact of ghetto racism
2. To account for the success of a Latino writer
3. To interpret shifts in society and the economy
4. To identify normal teen confusion
5. To discuss the themes of courage and new beginnings
6. To explain the harm of police brutality
7. To analyze school relationships
8. To describe attitudes toward manhood
9. To account for reversions to weapons and drug abuse
10. To analyze the roles of counselors, principals, and teachers

Specific Objectives

1. To explain why Mrs. Snelling rejects Luis
2. To analyze the Lomas' reaction to violent assaults, suicide, and deaths
3. To summarize the centrality of Luis to a truce
4. To account for changes in East Los Angeles
5. To describe ongoing discussions of racism at Keppel High School
6. To predict what Ramiro will gain from reading his father's memoir
7. To summarize incidents that introduce Luis to drugs and sex
8. To discuss resentment in gang members
9. To describe the roles of sisters, girlfriends, female teachers, and María Estela in Luis's life
10. To list the steps that precede Luis's return to education

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Luis Rodriguez's memoir, present the following terms and applications:

anti-hero a protagonist or central figure who lacks the usual heroic qualities of an admirable person or leader, particularly skill, grace, honesty, courage, and truth. The memoir stresses Luis's maturity from participation in infantile turf wars and grudge matches to mature attempts at peacemaking. Frequent lapses, drug use, fights, and jailings attest to the struggle within Luis to live up to the best parts of his character.

memoir a short recollection of personal observations and experiences composed as autobiography, biography, or historical fiction. Luis Rodriguez reflects on his youth in a detailed study of gang warfare from his pre-teens into young manhood. By recreating the ambivalence and illogical nature of childhood, he expresses the internal war that Latino boys experience in a crime-infested ghetto atmosphere.

sociological treatise reform literature that uses character and action to delineate a social problem. *Always Running* attempts to halt the delinquency of Ramiro Rodriguez by recounting a father's childhood faults and misdeeds to a confused and rebellious teen. The memoir also informs the reading public of the sources of anguish that lead to gang formation as protectors of vulnerable minority youths.

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in *Always Running* should include these aspects:

Themes

- rejection
- disobedience
- racism
- race pride
- upheaval
- gangs
- violence
- loss
- peacemaking
- opportunity

Motifs

- growing up in a barrio
- accounting for grudge battles
- comprehending betrayal
- coping with turf wars
- making life changes

Meaning Study

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the memoir. Explain each in context. Chapter and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. As the rain fell, my mother cursed in Spanish intermixed with pleas to saints and “la Santísima Madre de Dios.” (I, 13)
(The centrality of Catholicism is obvious in María Estela’s call on “the most holy mother of God,” a reference to the Virgin Mary. Such religious devotion is lacking in first-generation Mexican-Americans like Luis and his pals, who have no qualms about stalking and assaulting enemies.)
2. Their grandmother was a Tarahumara Indian who once walked down from the mountainous area in the state of Chihuahua where her people lived in seclusion for centuries. (I, 16)
(The Rodriguez genealogy includes a great grandmother from the western Sierra Madre, where agrarian Indians raise fruit and vegetables. The remote tribe takes pride in the fact that it was never subject to Spanish conquistadores. Their independence appears to have influenced Luis.)
3. For decades, L. A. was notorious for restrictive covenants—where some areas were off limits to “undesirables.” (I, 17)
(The Rodriguez family settles in a part of southern California that allows elitist whites to restrict housing and rental property from non-whites and immigrants. The complicity of school officials and law enforcement agencies in racism extends to the biased class assignments, low educational expectations, capricious arrests, and beatings of nonwhite youth.)
4. In the back lot of the local elementary school, about a year after Tino’s death, five of us gathered in the grass and created a club—“Thee Impersonations,” the “Thee” being an old English usage that other clubs would adopt because it made everything sound classier, nobler, badder. (II, 41)
(Children from tenuous ghetto communities search for ways to elevate their worth and to

defeat ignominy. They choose gang names that indicate social significance as a group. Luis continues, “It was something to belong to—something that was ours.”)

5. By 1970, I felt disjointed, out of balance, tired of just acting and reacting. I wanted to flirt with depth of mind, to learn more about my world. (IV, 113)
(At age 16, Luis feels intellect intruding on a life ruled by raw emotion. The disjointing he experiences is the emergence of a side of his character that he has failed to nurture because of his alienation at school.)
6. The big one was named Roberta, the cute one was Xochitl, a Nahuatl name which sounded like Shoshi, so that’s what we called her. (V, 127)
(The array of teen names and nicknames reveals the texture of their culture. Inclusion of Nahuatl names retrieves memories of the Mexican past when Aztecs controlled Tenochtitlan in north Central America. Later, Luis revives in himself the Nahuatl influence by dancing the role of Joe Aztec, the mascot of Keppel High School.)
7. They were primarily about the black experience, works coming out of the flames which engulfed many American cities in the 1960s. I discovered Claude Brown’s *Manchild* in the *Promised Land*, Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, and the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. (VI, 138)
(In an era preceding the Chicano literary renaissance, Luis learns about alienation and prejudice by reading the classic protest works of the black experience. He explains, “Here were books with a connection to me.”)
8. I had a cell next to Charles Manson. (VII, 163)
(The harm of placing impressionable juvenile delinquents adjacent to a murderous psychopath illustrates a flaw in the legal system. Luis has little in common with an insane serial killer, a cult leader who killed a pregnant woman, Sharon Tate, on August 9, 1969, for the thrill of shedding blood.)

9. The Watts Rebellion of 1965 changed forever the civil rights struggle in this country. (VII, 164)
(After passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, conservative Californians retaliated with Proposition 14, which countered efforts at fair housing standards. Rioting, burning, and lootings broke out in Watts on August 11, 1965, and extended for six days. Thousands were injured; 34 died, 27 of them black. Studies indicate that unemployment, slum housing, police stereotyping, and substandard schools contributed to the boil-over.)

10. My sketches dealt with pre-Columbian structures and street images such as hypodermic needles, cholos, and coffins. (VIII, 201)
(Luis's surreal scenarios grope for connection between the Central American past and the disorder that reigns in Los Angeles. The lack of cohesion in his world calls for "surrealism with floating objects and distorted faces," a symbol of the internal upheaval suffered by a despised immigrant people.)

The Importance of Setting

The milieu of Luis Rodriguez's *Always Running* caroms across a montage of scenes that define the teen angst of gang life for a boy named Grillo (grasshopper). Born to Mexican parents, he grows up in Watts, a minority community in Los Angeles. Luis's mother feels like an outsider because she speaks little English. Her sons' venture to a South Gate grocery store results in a severe beating by white youths. At the 109th Street School, Luis experiences teacher rejection, a root cause of unruly behavior. A brief move to a middle-class home in Reseda raises hopes before inadequate finances force the Rodriguez family to move in with Seni. In South San Gabriel, a haven of crime, Luis attends Richard Garvey Middle School and begins living the ideal of the Latino gangster. When the Animal Tribe invades Huntington Beach, Luis gets a personal taste of police intervention to protect whites from minorities.

Escalating criminality places Luis and his pals in the wrong at grocery stores, a record shop, malls, homes, and service stations. He robs the concession stand at a drive-in movie and flees amid gun-

fire. In exile in the family garage, Luis retreats into drugs, alcohol, and homelessness. At Mark Keppel High School, he enters the "stupid" classes and chooses to be an outlaw. At the San Gabriel mission, Fiesta Day is the setting for his flirtation with Viviana on a roof overlooking a carnival that erupts in a riot. A party at Nina's house gets out of control from gang bluster. He takes karate lessons at the community center and involves himself in shooting drugs and in the fire-bombing of Chava's house, a felony.

Luis's downward spiral includes a week at Continuation High School, transfer to Taft High School, and free reading at the Pierce College library. Crime rules his life as he breaks into houses and leaves a restaurant without paying for his food. After Chente redirects Luis to the Neighborhood Youth Corps, the boy spars in a boxing ring and protests the Vietnam War at Laguna Park. At the Los Angeles County Jail, Luis is locked in next to Charles Manson. The welter of positive and negative settings places Luis at home, at a Catholic church dance, and in an Aztec dance before he is arrested at a standoff against bikers. He gets another chance at normality during a mural project for the city of Rosemead. From Keppel High School, Luis enters California State College and, ironically, returns to jail for a crime he didn't commit. After abandoning college, he works in a paper factory, migrates to Chicago, and returns to find Los Angeles barrios rapidly changing from economic and social shifts.



Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the memoir.

Motivation

1. What causes youths to form gangs?
(From early childhood, Luis Rodriguez and his peers experience racial prejudice. The teachers at the 109th Street School assume that he should play with blocks while the English-speaking children study. After the decline in income forces the family to leave their home in Reseda and move in with Seni, Luis's half-sister, and their grandmother Catita, Luis gets into more trouble for shoplifting and fighting. By climbing a chain link fence, he and Tino trespass at the school after hours. Following the move to South San Gabriel, a haven of crime, Luis co-founds Thee Impersonations, his first venture into a clica. At Richard Garvey middle school, he begins flirting with girls and gets a tattoo. Alfonso and María Estela combat Luis's interest in sex and gangs, but Luis feels isolated by his lack of talent at sports and fighting. For self-protection, he and others form the Animal Tribe, a true teen gang.)

Setting

2. Describe jail.
(In Luis's various incarcerations at East Lake Juvenile Hall and jails in East L. A., Monterey Park, Pomona, and Temple City, he learns what to expect from older, more hardened criminals and from racist police and deputies like Coates. A sentence to San Gabriel's jail begins with standard booking. In the cells, Luis hears despair and gritos, a yell of a Chicano "who's drunk and angry." he studies "warrior's art," the folk drawings of past inmates along with their love poems and blues verses. To pass the time, he makes a handball from wet toilet paper to throw against the wall. In camaraderie with Night Owl, a Sangra enemy, Luis discusses family, life, songs, poetry, and women. The two part with respect for each other. After rescuing Licha Rubalcava from a police assault, Luis returns to the Los Angeles County Jail. On the bus ride, a deputy forces inmates to be silent, but Licha passes Luis a gum wrapper with her name and

phone number. He manages a visit with her before her transfer to Sybil Brand Women's Prison.)

Character Development

3. How does Luis change over time?
(From early childhood and hero worship of his brother José, Luis develops a distinct personality that tries to balance fighting and plotting assaults with love of girls, his culture, and literature. After years of seeing his friends maimed and killed outright in bloody ambushes, he wearies of the carnage. Chente impresses on Luis the waste of human life for turf that no one owns. Luis gradually weans himself from bad relationships with gang members and aggressive women and gives up weapons, sniffing, alcohol, and drugs. After he decides to return to Keppel High School, he works at being a peace-maker. From regressing into drugs and violence, he bounces back and continues a climb toward self-respect by painting murals. Capping his advance to full manhood is a prize of \$250 for his short stories and verse. By the end of the memoir, Luis is a husband and father of a potential gang member. The author publishes his experiences to express to his son Ramiro that gang membership makes adolescence harder, more dangerous, and less rewarding.)

Historical Milieu

4. How does the memoir depict racial change?
(While studying at Taft High School, Luis begins reading the radical authors of the black civil rights movement, notably, Amiri Baraka, Malcolm X, Claude Brown, and Eldridge Cleaver. The Watts Riot of 1969 releases pent-up barrio frustrations with white dominance in Los Angeles. Following the pattern of black self-determination, Latino gangs like the Lomas begin demanding their rights and pressing legitimate charges against police brutality, substandard housing, and school discrimination against non-white students. Gradually, the news media and federal authorities investigate East Los Angeles to determine how social and economic inferiority contribute to low self-esteem, gang violence, and community rebellion.)

Theme

5. Why is vengeance a controlling theme?
(In childhood, Luis learns from racist attacks on his brother José that life is an ongoing battle for Latino pride. After Luis and others form gangs, they stake out turf to protect and plot raids and ambushes. After each major assault, maimings and deaths require more retaliation. Escalation of territorial battles involves police and sheriff's deputies who contribute to vengeance. From fistfights and knifings, attacks reach the level of drive-by shootings with automatic weapons and shotguns and with the fire-bombing of Chavo's house with molotov cocktails. Luis's disillusion with vengeance causes him to join the community center sessions with Chente and to develop talents for leadership and negotiation. By abandoning vengeance, he promotes peace and a truce between the Lomas and Sangra. Setbacks and drug use lure him into the quagmire of revenge, but he eventually frees himself of his teen mindset and gives up la vida loca.)

Interpretation

6. Why is the memoir a target of censors?
(Luis Rodriguez chooses candor as a means of recreating the milieu in which Latinos turn to gangs. His language abounds with Spanish insults, crude slang, and coarse sexual terms. He describes the unfettered sexuality that draws males to aggressive females like Payasa and to sire children before teens are ready to be parents. Overt naming of genitalia and discussion of menstruation set the parameters for intimate conversations between boys and girls. Groping and female orgasm impress Luis at a time when he needs less violent evidence of his manhood. The emergence of rape as a gang ploy further attests to the connection between macho behavior and sexual aggression. Conservatives charge the author with instructing naive readers in brutality and disrespect for females. Other challenges disdain the breakdown of the Rodriguez family and the parents' inability to curb Luis's excesses.)

Conflict

7. How does conflict invigorate the narrative?
(From the beginning, when María Estela attempts to leave Alfonso and return to Juarez, conflict sets the atmosphere of the memoir. The author's tone implies that violence is an expect-

ed offshoot of racism and the denigration of Latinos in a white milieu. Because of Luis's jealousy of wealthy whites, he and his gang target white homes for break-ins and challenge white students to protect their turf from Latino interlopers. The Lomas constant struggle for primacy over the Sangra wears on Luis, causing him to question the gang mentality and to propose alternative methods of co-existing with enemies. As conflict rages out of control, sweeping innocent people into hospitals, jails, and morgues, Luis grows more certain that conflict must end before anyone in East Los Angeles can thrive.)

Atmosphere

8. How does Rodriguez indicate internal battles?
(The memoir pictures two battlefields—the external war between Los Angeles gangs and the internal war that Luis wages against his darker tendencies. As sorrow and mourning overwhelm him with each friend's death, suicide, blinding, or serious injury, Luis struggles against inner tendencies toward vengeance and toward escapism via strutting and bragging, casual sex, alcohol, drugs, and sniffing. After he realizes that most of his coping mechanisms are flawed, he gravitates toward sex as the most normal and least harmful of methods. He proves himself right through relationships with Licha, Terry, Rosie, and Camila. Although Terry claims that he fathers her unborn child, their affair ends with her disappearance. Fortunately for Luis, in summer 1974, he soothes his warring emotions by establishing a legal marriage to Camila, the mother of his first child, Ramiro.)

Author Purpose

9. Why does the memoir appeal to readers?
(Rodriguez's reflections compete with fiction in its steady rhythm and constant challenge to the main character. Readers experience verisimilitude in his responses to emergency rooms, wounds and deaths, ambush, courtrooms, and jail cells. Because of his candor, the text offers a front-row seat at a time in Los Angeles history when a major outburst of racial tensions during the Watts Riots of August 13-17, 1965, overflows into the media and world news. His role in demanding Latino rights places him at the fore-

front of a civil rights victory for minorities. Not only does Luis triumph over petty prejudice, he also suppresses the negative emotions of his youth to reach out for manhood and a notable career as a writer and mediator.)

Structure

10. Why does the memoir require an epilogue? *(Just as he reveals his troubled childhood, Rodriguez is honest about the failures of his own family. He poses as mentor to his son Ramiro, who wanders the same maze of faulty logic and wrongheadedness that stymied Luis in his teens. The epilogue reminds the reader that boys like Ramiro still need direction and a firm thrust away from crime and violence toward positive uses of energy and skill. By admitting that Ramiro's choices are unwise, the author enlists the reader's sympathy for a father who sees tragedy looming in the distance and who knows no better way to forestall it than with a full confession.)*

How Language Works

Luis Rodriguez balances plain-spoken text with philosophical commentary on the hazards of growing up in east Los Angeles.

1. In a description of his first interest in Elena, 12-year-old Luis states, "She didn't just know how to kiss, but how to take my hand through sections of her body and teach a pre-teen something of his own budding sexuality."
2. Concerning a flawed relationship with Alfonso, Luis admits, "He had these lines, these cuts of wisdom, phrases and syllables, which swept through me, sometimes even making sense. I had to deal with him at that level, with my brains."
3. From family unrest, Luis learns to appreciate his mother: "She prohibited anything with alcohol in the house, even beer. I later learned this rage came from how Mama's father treated her siblings and her mother, how in drunken rages he'd hit her mom and drag her through the house by the hair."

4. After marrying Camila in summer 1974, Luis recognizes maturity in himself: "I began a new season of life. Intellect and body fused, I now yearned to contribute fully, embodied with conscious energy, to live a deliberate existence dedicated to a future humanity."
5. Coming full circle to his own son's quandary, Luis explains, "Gangs are not alien powers. They begin as unstructured groupings, our children, who desire the same as any young person. Respect. A sense of belonging. Protection."

Across the Curriculum

Composition

1. Write a paragraph summarizing the importance of turf ownership and of cultural and racial respect to gang members. Include commentary about their compromised families, unemployment, substandard schools, ghetto housing, police brutality, and alcohol and drug abuse.
2. Compose an extended definition of pacifism. Use as a model the job of the Communicators at Keppel High School and their nonviolent tactics of mediation and peaceful walkouts to protest racist teachers, lack of Chicano history and literature, and gang grudge matches.
3. Describe in a theme the ways in which Chente and Mrs. Baez guide Luis away from killing and vengeance toward positive adult goals like education, a community truce, and a writing career.
4. Write a paragraph that contrasts life in Lomas with that of privileged white students in the Huntington neighborhood. Explain why jealousy and resentment inflames gang members to victimize whites with ambushes, coarse grafitti, and house break-ins.

Religion and Morals

1. Make a wall chart contrasting Luis's morals and behaviors in early youth and after he turned eighteen. Note why María Estela is proud of his maturity.

2. Discuss the image of the Virgen de Guadeloupe in one of the community murals. Explain why reverence to a perfect female contrasts with the despoliation and dishonor that Latinos display for teenage girls like Roberta, Viviana, and Payasa.

Drama

1. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of getting stitches without anesthesia, borrowing Roger Nelson's rifle and scope at 2:30 A.M., wearing the costume of Joe Aztec, working in a car wash, welcoming Rosie and Terry to the garage, escorting Viviana at a Catholic church dance, sniffing fumes in the hideout, lurking behind trash cans in an alley, fighting with an older brother over records, winning a soccer championship, stealing and wrecking an ice cream truck, grieving at the cemetery, counseling Ramiro about gangs, stabbing an innocent man with a rusty screwdriver, fighting off sheriff's deputies, and being treated for foot fungus. Supply sketches of costumes and props, such as a paper bag, aerosol cans, Aztec costume, trash cans, rifle and scope, tombstones, soccer ball, knife, leaves, screwdriver, rags and buckets, truck, night sticks, sutures, jackets, VW lowrider, and bicycle.
2. Create a storyboard account of Luis's return to Keppel High School and the receipt of his diploma from a dubious Mr. Madison. Include a classroom confrontation with Mr. Humes about his insult to Cha Cha in history class and later negotiations with Mr. Madison and Mrs. Baez about the best way to lodge a complaint against racism.

Education

1. Role-play the training of Hispanic youths in Chicano history and literature. Provide a reading list of stories, poems, novels, speeches, and documents that stress Hispanic heroes and role models like Pancho Villa, Evita Peron, Father Junípero Serra, Isabel Allende, Cesar Chavez, Gloria Esteban, Roberto Clemente, Lee Trevino, Gabriela Mistral, José Limón, Rita Moreno, Henry Cisneros, Gloria Molina, and Antonio Banderas.

2. Propose curriculum for a class to teach white students about Latino literature and culture, such as the Tarahumara Indians, La Llorona, Tenochtitlan, Aztecs, pre-Columbian civilization, and the Mexican Revolution. Make primary and supplemental reading lists that include Gary Soto, Sonia Sanchez, Gabriel García-Marquez, Laura Esquivel, Octavio Paz, Helen Viramontes, Mariano Azuela, Julia Alvarez, Carlos Fuentes, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Rudolfo Anaya.
3. Compile a parallel list of advantages and disadvantages to attending Keppel High School. Include speaking in English in class, receiving counsel from biased faculty, choosing between literature and shop class, discipline from Mr. Madison, organizing walkouts, and avoiding confrontations with privileged white students. Explain why polarization of the student body decreases concentration, social skills, and achievement in academic subjects.

Speech

1. Brainstorm ways of encouraging community discussion between gang members and a gathering of police, sheriff's deputies, business leaders, parents, teachers, and principals. Propose methods of honoring wounded and dead gang members like Clavo, Tino, Miguel Robles, and Little Man without encouraging retaliation, for example, by designing a memorial mural, naming a park or public building after them, or holding a poetry reading.
2. Organize a discussion of parenting a gang member. Answer these questions: Why do parents oust their children from home? How do single mothers cope with the demands of job, community, home, and family? What public agencies offer help in tenuous situations, including the jailing of a minor, rehabilitation from gunshot wounds, home raids by police, drive-by shootings, or abortions for unwed teens?
3. Compose a verbal tour of significant places in greater Los Angeles, including the San Gabriel mission, Will Rogers Park, Los Angeles River, Watts, Huntington Park, San Fernando Valley, Reseda, Huntington Beach, Monterey Park,

Laguna Park, Belvedere Park, and California State College. Contrast housing, entertainments, shopping, and educational opportunities for whites, Asians, and Latinos.

4. Outline a speech describing the complications of puberty brought on by gang wars. Contrast less aggressive females like Gloria, Seni, Esme, Elena, Nina, and Camila with Cha Cha, Delfina, Shoshi, Payasa, Marina, Socorro, Licha, Rosie, Terry, and Cokie.

Cinema

1. View films about teen aggression, such as *The Joy Luck Club*, *Malcolm X*, *Native Son*, *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, *Boyz 'n the Hood*, *Blackboard Jungle*, *Tex*, *Farewell to Manzanar*, and *West Side Story*. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and dialogue to those of *Always Running*. Comment on pictorial scenes that illustrate Luis's defiant spirit, especially his anger at biased teachers and counselors who make no effort to help Latinos gain a useful education or participate in school activities and sports.

Science and Health

1. Compose an illustrated handbook on treatment of contusions, rape, gunshot and stab wounds, alcohol and drug use, and head injuries. Explain how emergency rooms prepare for an influx of wounded after a racial faceoff with bikers or a grudge battle between Lomas and Sangras, for instance, by ordering a supply of whole blood and by calling in stand-by anesthesiologists, laboratory staff, and x-ray technicians.
2. List first aid, treatment, and complications of foot fungus from constant dampness at Luis's job at the car wash. Suggest ways that the curandero's crude slicing of spore clumps and the application of healing leaves relieve pain by releasing infection.

Geography and Culture

1. Create a mural or web site on East Los Angeles. Note the advantages of being born in El Paso rather than in Mexico. Contrast the lives of Latino-American teens with their Mexican peers, the cholos who live la loca vida along the Rio Brava.

2. Make an illustrated notebook of Hispanic culture in gang dress, murals, music, food, holidays, politics, education, worship, home decor, male-female relationships, child rearing, holiday celebrations, and daily customs. Include grita shouts from jail cells, Catholic sanctuaries, holding rosaries, flirtatious men, car painting, Aztec mascots, tattooing, punishment of pregnant teens, gang initiations, weapon ownership, ambushing outsiders, and quinceñera parties and other coming-of-age rituals.

Law

1. Compile an annotated list of legal and slang terms delineating gang relationships with the law. Mention accessory to murder, assault with the intent to commit murder, booking, assaulting a police officer, PD, San Quentin, cop a plea, juvey, public drunkenness, sentence, rape, loitering, rioting, and bail bond.
2. Make a chart of advice to young men who have legitimate complaints of police brutality, for example, collecting depositions from witnesses, making notes of names and badge numbers, and photographing wounds and crime scenes. Suggest a free community agency to press claims against rogue police or sheriff's deputies like Coates.

Social Studies and Economics

1. Discuss with a small group the changes in Los Angeles communities after electronics replaces mechanical industries and reduces the demand for unskilled labor.
2. Report orally on the physical and psychological effects of frequent Luis Rodriguez's family's moves from the barrio to Reseda and back and Luis's exile from a bedroom to the family's unheated garage. Comment on his choice of blues as the music best suited to his mood.
3. Compose an extended definition of social and emotional isolation. Explain why the term describes Luis, Puppet, Chicharrón, Roger Nelson, Miguel Robles, Yuk Yuk, Wilo, Chavo, and other gang members. Explain why the formation of a youth council, soccer team, and mural-painting projects begins supplanting violence with positive uses of teen energies and skills.

Psychology

1. Describe aloud the effect of Chavo's threat and weeping on Luis. Note differences in Luis as he advances from unattached gang member to respected leader, college student, author, husband of Camila, and father of Ramiro.
2. List aspects of Luis's life that indicate a profound change of heart. Discuss how going to college, winning \$250 for writing, living in Chicago, and leaving home replace the youthful need to attack enemies and exact vengeance.
3. Using incidents from the book, comment on gradual emotional changes in María Estela toward Luis. Explain why the offer of a home and support enables Luis to leave the barrio and develop his literary talents.
4. Characterize the moral influence on Luis from relationships with José, Elena, Chente, Mrs. Baez, Sangra members, Mr. Madison, Viviana, Licha, Camila, and Ramiro.
5. Write an encyclopedia entry on post-traumatic stress syndrome. Propose cures for lingering teen attitudes in Luis, for example, through group counseling, journal writing, mural painting, music and dance, travel, and devotion to wife and son.

Mathematics and Computers

1. Using desktop publishing, make a web site or bulletin board that identifies these terms: mescal, PCP, discourse, greasers, saxophone riffs, pimping, abyss, sniffing, tear gas, indigenous, Linotype, integrity, toked, consolidated, quinceñera, los cuatro, loitering, negotiation, Nahuatl, circumcision, eviction, Santa Ana winds, puta, barrio, spic, curandero, truce, ramada, incommunicable, lucid, paradox, caricature, ensuing, escalate, comply, confiscated, and grita.
2. Based on your understanding of the memoir, lead a panel discussion of the effects of a racism, debt, displacement, low-paying jobs, alcohol and drug use, eviction, domestic violence, ghetto life, thwarted ambition, vengeance, suspicion, and jailing on barrio families. Support your opinions with charts and facts from census reports, sociological surveys, and statistics obtained from

almanacs and economic and employment surveys.

Language and Speech

1. Prepare a dialogue dramatizing Luis's value to Chente and to school and community peacemakers. Indicate why some discussions fail to halt walkouts and violence.
2. Lead a debate about Luis's allegations against authorities, especially racist police, jailers, and sheriff's deputies like Coates. Explain why the author mentions the Rodney King trial and Watts riot as examples of non-white rebellion against victimization by whites.

Literature

1. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, speeches, fables, and stories that describe incidents of violence similar to the gang upheaval in Los Angeles. Include Paul Zindel's *The Pigman*, Irving Shulman's *West Side Story*, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*, Jane Wagner's *J. T.*, Gwendolyn Brooks's "We Real Cool," Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident*, Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, Stephen Crane's "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky," Livy's "The Mutiny of Body Parts," Yoko Kawashima Watkins's *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*, T. Coraghessan Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain*, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and Isabel Allende's *Daughter of Fortune*.
2. Explain in a theme the significance of the title. Propose causes of crazy behavior and account for the ongoing need to avenge insults and wrongs by fighting and ambushing enemies. Comment on Luis's shift from gang leader and fighter to peacemaker and traitor to the gang.
3. Write a theme in which you explain the role of a minor character, such as Alfonso Rodriguez, Coyote, Delfina, Lourdes, Daddio, Roger Nelson, Mr. Rothro, Charles Manson, and Fuzzy. Create a part for yourself, such as a classmate, barrio neighbor, gang member, sheriff's deputy, jailer, emergency room nurse, or teacher at Keppel High School. Explain why your choice limits your survey of Luis's life.

Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about the Luis Rodriguez, gang warfare, bilingualism, Los Angeles ghettos, La Llorona, teen sex, racism, Nahuatl terms, immigration, and other subjects and issues deriving from the memoir, consult these sources:

Articles

Sheridan, Mary Beth. "D. C. Official Helps Break Down Barriers of Languages," *Washington Post* (19 December 2004): C1.

Audiocassette

Aliens in America, Sandra Tsing Loh
Growing up Cuban, Carmen Deedy

Audiocassettes with books

Monster, Listening Library
MrNICE@XXX.COM, Recorded Books
The Shoestring Murders, Recorded Books

Books

American Me, Beatrice Griffith
Down These Mean Streets, Piri Thomas
Durango Street, Frank Bonham
Monster and Shooter, Walter Dean Myers
Touching Spirit Bear, Benjamin John Mikaelson

CD

"*West Side Story*"

Filmstrip

Self-Fulfillment, Guidance Associates

Internet

Immigration
<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/cuban3.html>

Kit

Everyday Law for Young Citizens, Social Studies School Service

Map

Frommer's Los Angeles 2005

Play

Twilight Los Angeles, 1992, Anna Deavere Smith

Poems

"Stone Walls Do Not a Prison Make," by Richard Lovelace

McArthur, Mary, "La Llorona," *Midwest Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (autumn 2000): 42.

Murray, Yxta Maya, "La Llorona," *North American Review* 281, no. 6 (November-December 1996): 24-27.

Reference Books

Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s Indian Terms of the Americas
Starting Sexual Relationships: Marriage and Living Together
Why Watts Exploded: How the Ghetto Fought Back

Short Stories

"Almos' a Man," Richard Wright
Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories, Sandra Cisneros

Slides

Characters in Crisis, Center for Humanities
An Inquiry into the Nature of Man: His Inhumanity and His Humanity, Center for the Humanities
No Man Is an Island, Center for the Humanities

Video

J. T.
Ragtime
Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here
Tex
West Side Story

Related Reading

Isabel Allende, *Daughter of Fortune*
T. Coraghessan Boyle, *The Tortilla Curtain*
Gwendolyn Brooks, "We Real Cool"
Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*
Walter Van Tilburg Clark, *The Ox-Bow Incident*
Lois Duncan, *Killing Mr. Griffin*
Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*
Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*
Benjamin John Mikaelson, *Touching Spirit Bear*
Walter Dean Myers, *Monster and Shooter*
Irving Shulman, *West Side Story*
Jane Wagner, *J. T.*
Yoko Kawashima Watkins, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*
Richard Wright, "Almos' a Man"
Paul Zindel, *The Pigman*

Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of violence in the lives of the characters, for example, gang rapes, Luis's split lip, Miguel Robles's death, José's fight with his brother over records, female assaults against Gloria, Tino's fall, Clavo's blinding, police brutality against Licha, Miguel's insistence that Luis stab a man with a screwdriver, the boxing match, Cokie's rape and murder, Fernando Luna's suicide by hanging, the melee at the Vietnam War protest, gunfire at the concession stand robbery, Wilo's murder, the shooting of Indio and Santos on their front lawn, the fire-bombing of a residence, the shooting of a helicopter, and the Watts riot.
2. Compile a list of actions and statements that demonstrate racism in the barrio, in classrooms, in the principal's office, among school counselors and teachers, during football games, after a Catholic church dance, at the grocery store, in jail, in hiring, between gangs, on highways, at a carnival, and in the police station.
3. Compose a scene in which Ramiro explains to his father why gangs still appeal to Latinos in the 1990s.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including: Viviana's promiscuity, Licha's public drunkenness, Mrs. Snelling's low expectations for Latino students, Payasa's wildness, Chicharrón's vengeance, cruelty of Sheila's father, Alfonso's outsized expectations, María Estela's annoyance with her delinquent son, José's anger, Gloria's hero worship, Puppet's aggression, Coates's brutality, drunkenness of María Estela's father, and Chente's idealism.
5. Account for the shifts in Luis's thinking and behavior before he finally gives up gangs and drugs and completes his education.

Vocabulary Test

Complete the following passages with appropriate words from the list below. You will have answers left over when you finish.

beseaching, calloused, confiscated, contorted, delved, disarray, distracted, ecstatic, emanated, ethereal, forged, heft, inquiries, loitering, materialize, participate, profundity, restrained, rosaries

But on that particular day everything felt in (1) _____. I did not (2) _____ in my usual manner. The constant questioning, (3) _____ which entertained but also had something daring—or foolish—in the asking, failed to (4) _____. The group (5) _____ into the social processes governing events in the world and the United states. I only saw (6) _____ faces on the pages. I laid my head back, (7) _____. The fascinating prose turned (8) _____—the (9) _____ lost on an empty field somewhere in the barrio.

I recalled the old people who came here, the men in brown suede hats and canes, and black-shawled women with (10) _____ clutched inside vein-streaked hands. I recalled the mothers who had to be (11) _____ as they lay across the casket, (12) _____ to be buried with their son or daughter. I recalled the working men with their (13) _____ palms and sun-beaten faces whose hardened eyes were (14) _____ from the heat of foundries or from under the sun's gaze—and I remembered the stream which (15) _____ from those dense eyes, how it pulled something raw and smoldering from every one of us.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

Identify the speaker of each of the following quotations from the novel and explain the significance.

_____ 1. The vatos defend a land which doesn't even belong to them. All the death—for what?

_____ 2. I didn't even feel the fracture in my jaw, the displacement which would later give me a dis-jointed, lopsided and protruding chin.

_____ 3. Pick us up, Joe... There's something happening here—and I'm scared.

_____ 4. When you're ready to visit, with respect to our house, you can come to eat.

_____ 5. I thought I was to be here for the students, so they can have someone to talk to and represent their interests. I didn't know I was supposed to be your eyes and ears.

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

_____ 1. The deaths of Chicharrón, Roger Nelson, Tino, and Miguel Robles seem inevitable in the hostile gang climate.

_____ 2. Once Luis falls in love with Camila, he ignores other girls.

_____ 3. Coates seems to look forward to an opportunity to brutalize Luis.

_____ 4. Alfonso pulls José off his brother to end the fight over missing records.

_____ 5. Sniffing and PCP are indulgences that relieve gang anguish over assaults and deaths.

_____ 6. From a rooftop, Luis observes the furor that precedes and follows Tino's fall.

_____ 7. Playing Josephine Aztec is a humiliating experience.

_____ 8. School counselors direct Latino students toward shop classes.

_____ 9. Luis feels relieved after Terry seeks an abortion.

_____ 10. Ramiro follows the violent example set by Thee Impersonations.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)**Part III: Completion (20 points)**

Fill each blank below with a word or phrase that completes the sentence.

1. _____ initiates organized theft from grocery stores, a record shop, malls, homes, and service stations.
2. Jandro Mares supervises the group's _____ thefts; Shed Cowager buys electronics, bikes, and guns.
3. Luis robs the _____ stand at a drive-in movie.
4. Luis tries to kill himself with liquor, pills, and _____ cans, but chooses not to slit his wrists.
5. The Animal _____ starts a band, Thee Occasions.
6. José stomps his brother's _____.
7. At _____ Day, Luis meets Viviana and climbs to a roof with her to survey the carnival.
8. _____ dates Wilo's sister Payasa, who is crazed on sniffing and drugs.
9. A brutal _____ precedes Luis's entry into the gang.
10. After the shooting death of Little Man, the gang takes Luis to _____'s house to toss fire bombs.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page.

1. Describe the influence of racism on gang aims and actions.
2. Explain how alcohol and drug abuse promote risk-taking.
3. Discuss the complicity of girls in fights and ambushes.
4. Account for Chente's value as friend and adviser.
5. Summarize events that precede Luis's call for a truce.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Matching (30 points)

Match the following descriptions with names of characters from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left. You will use some answers more than once and some not at all.

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| _____ 1. suffers diabetes, swollen veins, and tooth loss | A. Luis |
| _____ 2. loves Luis for protecting her from police brutality | B. Payasa |
| _____ 3. fights for José out of love | C. Alfonso |
| _____ 4. loses a substitute teaching job | D. Chava |
| _____ 5. marries Elvie | E. Mr. Humes |
| _____ 6. urges conferring with Mr. Madison | F. Mrs. Baez |
| _____ 7. makes a racist slur at Cha Cha | G. María Estela |
| _____ 8. becomes Chicharrón's girl | H. Pérez |
| _____ 9. fights Luis in the ring | I. Chente |
| _____ 10. gives Luis a book of Mexican murals | J. John |
| _____ 11. is sentenced to San Quentin | K. Maravilla Kid |
| _____ 12. comes back from rehab with normal hair | L. Shoshi |
| _____ 13. dies in his living room from a shotgun blast | M. Tiburón |
| _____ 14. loses a finger and his job | N. José |
| _____ 15. weeps in Luis's arms | O. Licha |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided.

- _____ 1. Who destroys a saxophone?
- _____ 2. At what age does Luis tire of gang life?
- _____ 3. Who looks like a priestess from Tenochtitlan?
- _____ 4. Who shoots the biker in the rear?
- _____ 5. What weapon does Puppet press on Luis?
- _____ 6. Who reads Luis's first poems and stories?
- _____ 7. How much prize money does Luis win?
- _____ 8. How does Fernando Luna kill himself?
- _____ 9. What gang holds a grudge against Roger Nelson's family?
- _____ 10. What racial group begins moving in near Hispanics in east Los Angeles?

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)**Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)**

Select the phrase that completes each of the following sentences. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. Gang behavior gets out of control at
A. the Los Angeles County Jail.
B. Nina's party.
C. the Rodriguez garage.
D. La Casa Community Center.
- _____ 2. Luis is saddened and disillusioned by
A. Viviana's betrayal.
B. Gloria's operation.
C. the move to Reseda.
D. readings of black power writers.
- _____ 3. The Watts riot changes
A. Chente's intent to commission more murals.
B. Luis's testimony at the murder trial.
C. Mrs. Snelling's attitude toward Hispanic males.
D. civil rights struggles.
- _____ 4. Luis's older brother gradually changes into.
A. the school mascot.
B. a member of a group of retarded kids.
C. Joe.
D. a failed gang leader.
- _____ 5. Gloria does not expect
A. an offer of an abortion.
B. her mother's anger.
C. retaliation by girls.
D. Luis to accept a part in Thee Impersonations' band.
- _____ 6. After a near-death experience, Luis
A. borrows a rifle with a scope.
B. stops sniffing spray.
C. proposes to Camila.
D. meets Licha at her home.
- _____ 7. From the cells come
A. soulful gritos.
B. new members of the Sangra.
C. racist deputies like Coyote.
D. poems by writers like Amiri Baraka.

- _____ 8. Mrs. Baez encourages Luis to
A. move to Chicago.
B. stop taking drugs before sessions with other students.
C. compete in the Aztec dance.
D. be a Communicator.
- _____ 9. At Taft High School,
A. Alfonso is little more than a custodian.
B. Luis wants to study photography.
C. Mr. Madison assembles students on the playing field.
D. Mr. Rothro recalls Luis's talents and aims.
- _____ 10. Nightly, barrio residents expect
A. helicopters.
B. gang-related rape.
C. shotgun fire.
D. police raids.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page.

1. Explain why deaths escalate among gang members.
2. Contrast Miguel Robles, Chente, and Luis as leaders.
3. Describe Luis's court appearances.
4. Account for Luis's involvement with a series of girls.
5. Estimate the value of the memoir to Ramiro.

Answer Key

Vocabulary

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1. disarray | 6. contorted | 11. restrained |
| 2. participate | 7. distracted | 12. beseeching |
| 3. inquiries | 8. ethereal | 13. calloused |
| 4. materialize | 9. profundity | 14. forged |
| 5. delved | 10. rosaries | 15. emanated |

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

- Chente expresses to Luis the pointlessness of defending turf that really belongs to no one.
- Luis contemplates Eddie's schoolyard assault, which leaves Luis with a facial contortion that leads to his nickname "Chin."
- Gloria "Shorty" Rodriguez realizes that female aggressors intend to carry the grudge war from male gang members to Luis's sister.
- María Estela opens the way to reconciliation with Luis by inviting him to breakfast.
- Mrs. Baez walks a fine line between counselor to Latinos at Keppel High School and co-conspirator.

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T |
| 2. F | 7. F |
| 3. T | 8. T |
| 4. T | 9. F |
| 5. T | 10. F |

Part III: Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1. Yuk Yuk | 6. saxophone |
| 2. car | 7. Fiesta |
| 3. concession | 8. Luis |
| 4. aerosol | 9. initiation |
| 5. tribe | 10. Chava |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. F | 11. M |
| 2. O | 7. E | 12. B |
| 3. A | 8. L | 13. J |
| 4. C | 9. K | 14. H |
| 5. N | 10. I | 15. D |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

- | | |
|----------------|--------------|
| 1. José | 6. Mrs. Baez |
| 2. 16 | 7. \$250 |
| 3. Esme | 8. hanging |
| 4. Luis | 9. Sinisters |
| 5. screwdriver | 10. Asians |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. B |
| 2. A | 7. A |
| 3. D | 8. D |
| 4. C | 9. B |
| 5. C | 10. A |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

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