

# Any Small Goodness

by Tony Johnston

Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass

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## Synopsis

### American Names

Stressing the goodness of residents of Los Angeles, the text introduces 11-year-old Arturo, a Mexican boy whose family settled in Los Angeles three years earlier. He recalls Miss Pringle introducing him as Arthur and his admiration for short, sharp American names. Jaime becomes James, Alicia becomes Alice, and Raúl becomes Ralph. Arturo's parents accept the change without comment, but Abuelita mutters while grinding chiles on a pitted stone. She spoils neighborhood children by feeding them good things.

Arturo's mother is so terrified of possums that she calls 911 and has the police remove them from the garbage can. In the room next to Arturo's, Abuelita speaks to her dead husband about their grandson. He realizes that his name is his connection to family. He summons his friends, who swear on the grinding stone to regain their names. He celebrates a successful reclamation of names by buying Abuelita a cactus.

### Corn Fungus

The family cat is named for corn fungus, a native American delicacy. In her corn patch, Abuelita prays to Jesus and native gods for fungus. Luis plays trumpet and Arturo scrapes a gourd in a band called Mega Mango. Their practice scares Huitla, the family cat. After she disappears for two weeks, Leo Love finds her. Abuelita offers Leo a lime and hugs him. The paperboy divulges that Leo spent a night in a tree while trying to save Huitla. Abuelita names Leo "The Esteemed One."

### The Coach

Three years after reclaiming his name, Arturo dreads playing basketball at school. On the way, older guys shove him out of the way. The coach introduces "Coach Tree," a famous NBA player who volunteers to help the team. A team member named José steals items from Coach Tree to sell. Because Coach Tree tries to help José, Abuelita makes hot chilies for the coach.

### Piano Lessons

Arturo likes to read the *L.A. Times*. Papi weeps at an account of illegal Mexican immigrants killed in a highway accident. Another obituary mentions Leona Scott, a 33-year-old jazz pianist who taught barrio kids and earned the name "Mama Dulce." Former students flocked to her during her illness, brought gifts, and played music. For Valentine's Day, Papi and the children paint rocks in the yard with bright colors. Arturo admires people who go to extremes to love and aid each other.

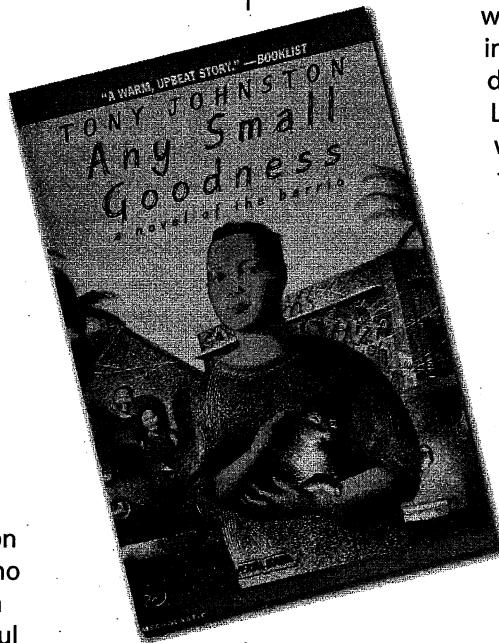
### The River

On the way home from school, Arturo stops by the L.A. River. He recalls how Ms. Cloud helped him find books on his first visit to the library. After a benefactor stocks

the library with new materials, the children launch a thank-you parade. Arturo follows her from the library and sees her enter a chauffeur-driven Jaguar. Because she lacks credentials, the school board fires her. Arturo hopes she still wears her disguise while serving in another barrio library.

### The Band

In Valentín, Papi's beloved Studebaker, the band rides to the high school. Young toughs ridicule the car. At the dance, the punks interrupt, but depart after a heated standoff.



**Lunch Box**

While pondering revenge against punks, Arturo reads about Edmond Dantès, the seeker of vengeance in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Papi, who works in a furniture store, paints rocks in the yard as a Valentine's Day gift for Mami. He buys Rosa a pink lunch box for entering the first grade. She writes to her pen pal, Leo Love. That night, punks fire bullets into the house, rocks, and lunch box. The family huddles in fear. Officer Paster investigates and returns the next day with a new pink lunch box for Rosa. Papi reminds Arturo that goodness in any form is valuable.

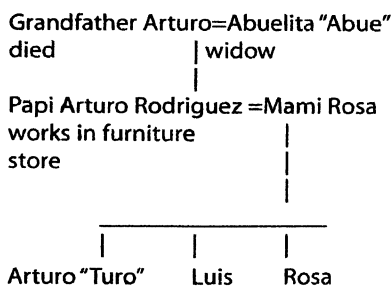
**The Green Needle Gang**

Arturo broods over the outrage to his family and pledges himself to retaliation. Before Christmas, he forms the Green Needle Gang. Carlos is the getaway driver. As they prowl Olivo Street, they locate the home of Pigeon Woman and leave food, toys, and a tree for her children.

**Christmas Presents**

At Christmas, the Rodriguez family draws names for gifts. They feast on holiday cookies and tamales, which they dole out to friends, including Leo Love, Officer Paster and his partner, Miss Pringle, and Coach Tree. Papi gives Mami a third wise man for the manger scene. Abuelita receives five tamale husk angels. Huitla fondles a catnip bird. Luis gets a new shirt. Rosa makes Papi a pink scarf. Arturo gets a small wooden Christmas tree. He loves the good people in the barrio.

**Character Genealogy**



**Author Sketch**

A fourth-grade teacher turned children's poet and writer, Tony Johnston expresses empathy for children. Her love of reading began in childhood with Arthurian legends by T. H. White.



She advanced to journal-keeping in sixth grade, when she began compiling interesting words. With degrees in history and education from Stanford, she taught public elementary school. In the late 1960s, her husband, Roger Johnston, was transferred to a bank in New York City, where she read manuscripts for Harper & Row. Johnston profits from knowledge of different locales. When colleagues encouraged her to submit her own work, she first published in 1970 with a submission to Putnam's. When the banking job took her husband to Mexico City, she reared their daughters—Ashley, Jenny, and Samantha—while traveling and writing in Spanish and English. One of her clients was the Mexican government. After a return to her hometown of San Marino, California, in 1985, Johnston continued learning the workings of the children's book world. She clerked at a book store, taught writing at UCLA, and developed story ideas for over 100 books. In 2005, she adapted the "Sword in the Stone" episode from Arthurian lore into *The Spoon in the Bathroom Wall*.

**Critic's Corner**

A master of poetry, historical fiction, and imaginative tales, Tony Johnston has earned renown among librarians, teachers, parents, and readers. Her awards include a Smithsonian Magazine's Notable Books for Children, a "Books to Enjoy" honorarium from *World Almanac for Kids*, and a Children's Book of the Year from the Southern California Booksellers Association for *Any Small Goodness*. She also received the 2000 Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award honor for *An Old Shell*.

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- Dales, Brenda. "Review: *Any Small Goodness*," *Library Talk* 15,

no. 3 (May/June 2002): 41-42.

Kurkjian, Catherine, et al. "Global Dimensions," *Reading Teacher* 57, no. 7 (April 2004): 698.

McNeil, Sharon, et al. "Review: *Any Small Goodness*," *School Library Journal* 47, no. 9 (September 2001): 226.

Ralston, Jennifer. "Review: *Any Small Goodness*," *School Library Journal* 49, no. 10 (October 2003): 98.

Scharer, Patricia L., et al. "Review: *Any Small Goodness*," *Language Arts* 80, no. 4 (March 2003): 312.

Yokota, Junko, and Mingshui Cai. "Review: *Any Small Goodness*," *Language Arts* 79, no. 5 (May 2002): 435.

## Other Works by the Author

*The Adventures of Mole and Troll*, 1970

*Mole and Troll Trim the Tree*, 1974

*Five Little Foxes and the Snow*, 1977

*Happy Birthday, Mole and Troll*, 1979

*Odd Jobs and Friends*, 1982

*Vanishing Pumpkin*, 1983

*The Witch's Hat*, 1984

*The Quilt Story*, 1985

*Father Mack Measures His Pig*, 1986

*Whale Song*, 1987

*Yonder*, 1988

*Pages of Music*, 1988

*Night Noises*, 1989

*My Best Friend Bear*, 1989

*I'm Gonna Tell Mama I Want an Iguana*, 1990

*The Soup Bone*, 1990

*The Cowboy and the Black-Eyed Pea*, 1992

*Amber on the Mountain*, 1994

*The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote*, 1994

*The Iguana Brothers*, 1995

*Alice Nizzy Nazy, the Witch of Santa Fe*, 1995

*Very Scary*, 1995

*The Magic Maguey*, 1996

*The Wagon*, 1996

*Fishing Sunday*, 1996

*The Ghost of Nicholas Greebe*, 1996

*How Many Miles to Jacksonville*, 1996

*Sparky and Eddie: The First Day of School*, 1997

*Four Scary Stories*, 1997

*Day of the Dead*, 1997

*Bigfoot Cinderrrrrella*, 1998

*Sparky and Eddie: Wild, Wild Rodeo*, 1998

*Amber on the Mountain*, 1998

*Trail of Tears*, 1998

*The Chizzywink and the Alamagoozum*, 1998

*It's About Dogs*, 1999

*Little Rabbit Goes to Sleep*, 1999

*We Love the Dirt*, 1999

*The Soup Bone*, 1999

*The Bull and the Fire Truck*, 1999

*An Old Shell*, 1999

*The Vanishing Pumpkin*, 1999

*Slither McCreep and His Brother Joe*, 1999

*Big Red Apple*, 2000

*The Barn Owls*, 2000

*Desert Song*, 2000

*Sparky and Eddie: The First Day of School*, 2001

*My Mexico*, 1999

*Boo: A Ghost Story That Could Be True*, 1999

*Clear Moon, Snow Soon*, 2001

*Desert Dog*, 2001

*Any Small Goodness*, 2001

*Cat, What Is That*, 2001

*Uncle Rain Cloud*, 2001

*Alien & Possum: Friends No Matter What*, 2001

*Gopher Up Your Sleeve*, 2002

*Sunsets of the West*, 2002

*That Summer*, 2002

*Alien & Possum: Hanging Out*, 2002

*Isabel's House of Butterflies*, 2003

*Go Track a Yak*, 2003

*The Mummy's Mother*, 2003

*A Kenya Christmas*, 2003

*The Ancestors Are Singing*, 2003

*Uncle Rain Cloud*, 2003

*The Harmonica*, 2004

*Ten Fat Turkeys*, 2004

*The Worm Family*, 2004

*The Harmonica*, 2004

*Noel*, 2005

*The Whole Green World*, 2005

*The Spoon in the Bathroom Wall*, 2005

*Chicken in the Kitchen*, 2005

*Ghosts on Toast*, 2005

*Sticky People*, 2006

*Angel City*, 2006

## General Objectives

1. To understand the impact of crime on a family
2. To account for the formation of a barrio
3. To interpret multicultural challenges in a public school
4. To identify good deeds
5. To discuss the theme of unity
6. To explain the structure of a three-generation family
7. To analyze the value of libraries

8. To describe attitudes toward authority figures
9. To account for secrets
10. To analyze the role of family cook

### Specific Objectives

1. To explain why Coach Tree impresses students
2. To analyze Rosa's reaction to a drive-by shooting
3. To summarize the centrality of Abuelita to the family
4. To account for the creation of the Green Needle Gang
5. To describe the fun of Christmas for the Rodriguezes
6. To explain Papi's love of Valentín
7. To summarize Arturo's relationship with people he respects
8. To discuss the role modeling of teachers, librarian, and police
9. To describe the roles of José, Alicia, Mama Dulce, and the Pigeon Woman
10. To list the insights that shape Arturo's character.

### Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Tony Johnston's fiction, present the following terms and applications:

**Hero** a protagonist or central figure who displays heroic qualities of an admirable person or leader, particularly skill, grace, honesty, courage, and truth. The term describes Papi, who remains self-controlled when a gang taunts him in traffic and who protects his family during and after the drive-by shooting. Most important to the Rodriguezes is his insistence on worthy family values, such as noticing small good deeds.

**Episode** an event, anecdote, or incident in a narrative that stands out on its own merit, for example, Arturo's decision to reclaim his name. Although the incident could be read as a short story, the themes of pride and dignity influence much of the text.

### Related Reading

Joseph Bruchac, *Bowman's Store*  
Karen Cushman, *The Midwife's Apprentice*  
Carmen Deedy, *Growing Up Cuban*  
Ron Jones, *Acorn People*  
Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy*  
Joseph Krumbold, *And Now Miguel*  
Walter Dean Myers, *The Blues of Flats Brown*  
Amy Tan, "Fish Cheeks"

Theodore Taylor, *The Cay*  
John Van Druten, *I Remember Mama*  
Jane Wagner, *J. T.*  
Yoko Kawashima Watkins, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*  
Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*  
Lawrence Yep, *Dragonwings*

### Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about Tony Johnston, Mexico, immigration, Spanish, bilingualism, Los Angeles, gangs, barrios, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

#### Articles

"The Star-Spanish Banner," *New York Daily News* (1 May 2006).  
Sussman, Lisa. "Spanglish," *Girls' Life* 12, no. 1 (August/September 2005): 17.

#### Audiocassette

*Aliens in America*, Sandra Tsing Loh  
*Chavez Ravine: Culture Clash*, Theatre Works  
*Growing up Cuban*, Carmen Deedy

#### Books

*Always Running*, Luis J. Rodriguez  
*And Now Miguel*, Joseph Krumbold  
*The Blues of Flats Brown*, Lawrence Yep  
*Bowman's Store*, Joseph Bruchac  
*J. T.*, Jane Wagner  
*So Far from the Bamboo Grove*, Yoko Kawashima Watkins

#### Internet

Nahuatl Culture  
<http://www.azteca.net/aztec/nahuatl/index.shtml>  
Nahuatl Language  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nahuatl\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nahuatl_language)

#### Legend

Seeger, Alan J. "The Legend of the Five Suns,"  
<http://www.spiritpathways.com/5suns.html>

#### Map

Los Angeles  
<http://maps.google.com>

#### Reference Books

*Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California*  
*Do or Die*  
*A Rainbow of Gangs*  
*Wallbanger'*

#### Short Story

"Fish Cheeks," Amy Tan

**Video**

- Babe*
- The Electric Grandmother*
- I Remember Mama*
- J.T.*
- Pig in the City*
- Sarah, Plain and Tall*
- The Secret of NIMH*
- Stuart Little*
- Watership Down*

**The Importance of Setting**

The milieu of Tony Johnston's *Any Small Goodness* stresses the uniqueness of barrio life in a large metropolitan city dominated by white people. Within Los Angeles, the Hispanic community has its own lifestyle and expectations. People like the Rodriguezes take pride in small, neat homes and assert their culture by celebrating Christmas in Mexican style. On Valentine's Day, the painting of rocks with bright colors demonstrates a native appreciation of bright colors, the recycling of rocks as yard decoration, and Papi's love for Mami.

In the outside world, Arturo studies the sidewalks and the L. A. River spillway, elements of big-city life. Older boys express territoriality by shoving Arturo and other small kids out of the way. Unruffled by the existence of hardcases in the barrio, Arturo and his friends in the band Mega Mango play dance music at the school auditorium. To his surprise, the wonderful array of books in the school library are the gift of an outsider, Ms. Cloud, who obviously disguises herself like a local woman rather than reveal her wealth. Another aspect of Arturo's world is a pleasant meeting with Leo Love, who risks allergies to rescue Huitla from a tree and to return her to the family.

**Themes and Motifs**

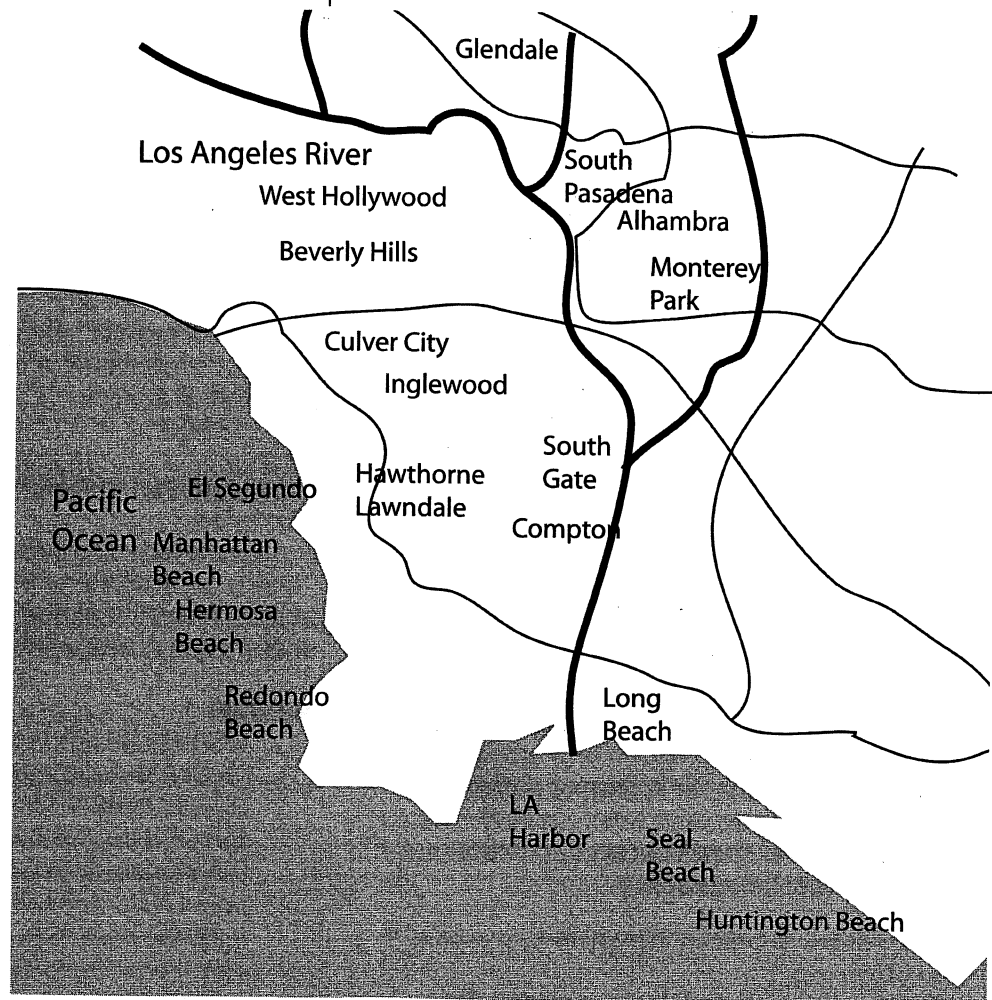
A study of the central issues and situations in *Any Small Goodness* should include these aspects:

**Themes**

- family
- innocence
- danger
- urbanism
- identity
- reading
- creativity
- sharing

**Motifs**

- growing up in a barrio family
- understanding the gang mentality
- comprehending good deeds
- coping with emotional trauma
- championing goodness



## Meaning Study

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

1. Like those saber-toothed tigers in pits of tar, kids get sucked into them. (*American Names*, p. 13)  
(In a description of the draw of gang membership, Tony Johnston refers to the La Brea Tar Pits, a downtown Los Angeles museum. Set at an Ice Age trap, the building houses the remains of mammoths, dire wolves, bison, turtles, rodents, ancient birds, bears, coyotes, condors, ground sloths, and saber-toothed tigers that were immured in oozing asphalt. Recovery of skeletons provides scientists with a glimpse of animal and plant life in the distant past.)
2. Los pobres desperately seeking for betterment, but often finding worse. (*Piano Lessons*, p. 54)  
(Papi pities the flood of illegal immigrants who escape joblessness and insecurity in Mexico for a risky dash over the U. S. border. The poor are often ill-informed country folk tricked out of their money and hurried from place to place in airless trucks.)
3. I am Siqueiros! I am Orozco! I am Rivera! (*Piano Lessons*, p. 61)  
(While painting rocks in the yard, Papi compares his artistry to three famous Mexican artists. David Alfaro Siqueiros, from Chihuahua, produced stunning political and social works. José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera created realist murals.)
4. Man, this Edmond Dantès character's expert at dealing out *venganza*. (*Lunch Box*, p. 90)  
(A character from classic French literature by Alexandre Dumas, Edmond Dantès suffers the betrayal of local people and an extended imprisonment near a saintly holy man. After studying the elements of crimes against him, Edmond makes a spectacular escape by sea and is rescued by pirates. One by one, he repays each villain for stealing his reputation and his fiancée and for causing his father to die of starvation.)
5. From last year, our Day of the Dead altar's still up on one counter. (*Lunch Box*, p. 95)  
(A traditional Mexican holiday, the Day of the Dead celebrates the lives of the departed. Celebrated for two days following Halloween, it arouses joy in food and partying by reminding people to make the most of life. In homes, a family altar groups candles, icons, and flowers with food, cartoonish skeletons, and photos of deceased family members.)
6. In life there is *bueno* and there is *mallo*. (*Lunch Box*, p. 103)  
(At the introduction of the title, the author pictures Papi com-

forting Arturo following the drive-by shooting. Earlier, Papi explains to his son, "When no eyes are upon him, that is a person's true test." Papi places on his middle child an obligation to look for good and to value even small acts of kindness and generosity.)

7. Raúl, the mad linguist yells, "Excelsior!" (*The Green Needle Gang*, p. 115)  
(Raúl is fascinated by words. He urges in Latin the pursuit of excellence. The word is the state motto of New York.)
8. The whole place is glopped up with deformed reindeer that Luis and I once made and a *nacimiento* with only two wise men left (a thing that causes Mami to mourn) and Rosa's paper chains. (*Christmas Presents*, p. 117)  
(The family's contribution to Christmas includes a crèche, a tableau of Christ's birth in a manger. First assembled by St. Francis of Assisi, the scene incorporates farm animals and lowly shepherds along with a hovering host of angels. Although folk tradition calls for three magi, scripture actually refers to them in the plural without a number.)
9. Then we stop, clink mugs, and sip [atole] a gluggy drink as old as the gods themselves. (*Christmas Presents*, p. 121)  
(A traditional Central American hot drink to accompany tamales, atole is a native American blend of corn mush with milk, cinnamon, vanilla, and chocolate.)
10. Like Vincente Fernandez, the *ranchera* king. (*Christmas Presents*, p. 123)  
(Arturo compares Papi's singing to that of Vincente Fernandez, a Mexican singing in Ranchera style. Fernandez's expertise at regional melody, ballads, and themes earned him a Latin Grammy.)

## 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 novel.

### Motivation

1. What causes Arturo to long for vengeance?  
(The drive-by shooting into the Rodriguez home comes at bedtime, a vulnerable moment in the life of any family. Rosa has just said good night to her pink lunch box, which is on the kitchen window sill. As bullets spray the house, they strike the painted rocks in the yard and shatter Rosa's lunch box, which contains her pen pal letter from Leo Love. The terror of crouching on the floor and the frustration of knowing that the police can do little to find the criminals anger Arturo. He yearns for a

chance to repay the shooters, but, instead, organizes the Green Needle Gang, who distribute Christmas presents, a tree, and food to a poor family.)

**Setting**

- Describe the L. A. River.  
(On Arturo's walk home from school to the barrio, he parallels the L. A. River, a thin stream that runs through a concrete sluice. The tiny river seems dwarfed by so large a city as Los Angeles. Arturo considers the river a mockery of a body of water.)

**Action**

- How does the family celebrate?  
(The celebration of holidays is important to the Rodriguez family. Long after November 2, they keep a Day of the Dead altar in the kitchen. In December, they feast and make tamales for Christmas gifts for important people in their lives, including Coach Tree, Officer Paster, and Leo Love. For their own family, they decorate the house, put up a tree, and draw names from the cookie jar for gifts. Each person gives one present that expresses personal emotions and skills. The presents include a wise man for Mami's crèche, five corn husk angels for Abuelita, a festive shirt for Luis, a catnip bird for Huitla, a pink scarf for Papi, and a small wooden Christmas tree ornament for Arturo.)

**Historical Milieu**

- How does the novel depict barrio life?  
(Starting with her introduction, Tony Johnston strikes a balance between everyday pleasures and the ongoing gang warfare, intimidation, pilfering and theft, mistreatment of younger children by older children, traffic violations, and drive-by shootings. Papi encourages Arturo to look for good things to praise and emulate, such as food and gifts for the poor and pity for people who suffer, such as the illegal Mexican immigrants killed on the highway and Leona Scott, the volunteer piano teacher who dies at age 33 of a blood ailment. The closeness of barrio residents reassures Arturo that there is much good in people.)

**Theme**

- Why is quiet benevolence a theme?  
(Papi believes that the real test of good deeds is the kindness and generosity that people do in secret with no hope of recognition or reward. The Green Needle Gang brings to life his values by coordinating secret Christmas gifts to people in need. Other examples of quiet kindnesses include Leo's climb into the tree to retrieve a cat that gives him allergies, Ms. Cloud's concealment of her Jaguar and chauffeur, the gift of a pink lunch box to a traumatized first grader, and Coach Tree's donation of time to a barrio basketball team.)

**Interpretation**

- What is Tony Johnston's justification of gangs?  
(Through Arturo, the author explains how children "get sucked

into" gangs, like saber-toothed tigers in the La Brea Tar Pits. Gangs assure territoriality for the barrio, which tends to be invaded by outsiders. According to Tony Johnston, directionless, misguided kids gravitate to membership "to have a place to go, or something to do." Arturo notes that some local family men were once gang members. His father, who has no need to protect territory, is "not prime gang material.")

**Symbols**

- What symbols dominate the story?  
(Characters appear alongside items that individualize them. Luis plays the trumpet in the Mega Mango band. Arturo, who is a mediocre basketball player and musician, manages to scrape the gourd during band performances. Papi, who loves games of dominoes at lunch with co-workers, adores his wife and his Studebaker, a revived wreck that he names Valentín. Both Mami and Abuelita express love and creativity as cooks by making chiles rellenos, mole, menudo, and Christmas tamales. Rosa, the youngest Rodriguez, adores her name, which she shares with her mother. Rosa's innocence takes shape in her pink lunch box, in which she stores a letter from her pen pal. Overall, the novel's symbols define members of a family that fosters love and giving.)

**Aphorism**

- What words of wisdom give the story lasting merit?  
(At significant points in the episodic story, Arturo learns something about human goodness. In "American Names," he decides to fight for his Latino name after hearing his grandmother pray to the original Arturo, her deceased husband. "Corn Fungus" concludes with Papi's claim that a true test of character is a good deed performed in secret rather than openly in anticipation of a reward or thanks. From "The Coach," a volunteer at Arturo's high school, the boy observes the practice of a skill for love rather than money. Leona Scott, the focus of "Piano Lessons," chooses to foster barrio children rather than to play music for money. Parallel to her concern for the unfortunate are Papi's tears for illegal Mexican immigrants killed on the highway while trying to make a better life for their children. Another example of dedication to the young is the example set by Ms. Cloud, the librarian in "The River." Johnston inserts a troubling question about the persistence of evil after a gang intrudes on a school dance in "The Band." Goodness begins its resurgence in "Lunch Box," in which the terror of a drive-by shooting precedes Officer Paster's gift of a new lunch box for Rosa. Papi urges Arturo to value gestures of goodness and generosity. The lesson recurs in "The Green Needle Gang," in which Arturo and his friends brighten Christmas for the Pigeon Woman and her children. In the closing chapter, love radiates in "Christmas Presents" as the Rodriguez family shares creativity and family warmth by drawing names and making gifts for each other.)

## Author Purpose

9. Why does the novel appeal to readers?  
*(Tony Johnston's narrative is an overt effort to dispel notions that barrios are filled with "lowlifes" and gang members. She creates lovable, believable characters who care for each other and for their community, school, and Hispanic culture. Gifts of a cactus, tamales, and chiles derive from Mexican heritage. The explanation of corn fungus as a kitchen delicacy suggests the ability to turn spoiled corn kernels into a treat, a subtle symbol of the Rodriguez family's pragmatism. Similarly, readers learn from Arturo's example a basic Christian principle—to turn a chilling, murderous attack on the Rodriguez residence into vengeance for good. By celebrating Christmas with gifts for the poor, he wins the reader's admiration.)*

## Structure

10. Why does the novel require an introduction?  
*(Tony Johnston assembles the good and bad of the second largest American city to make a point. Although cities harbor the wealthy, the impoverished, and the lawless, extremes do not determine the worth of all the citizens. In her estimation, Los Angeles retains "warmth and humor and humanity" in part because of its Hispanic citizenry. To stress the philosophy of the average Latino-American, she cites a snack shop sign: "ONE CAUSE, ONE PEOPLE, ONE TACO.")*

## How Language Works

Tony Johnston enhances the story of the Rodriguez family by stressing sense impressions:

1. Arturo wonders at Abuelito's insistence on pulverizing chilies with a grinding stone rather than with a food processor. He listens to her voice during the process: "At every chance she turns "Arturo" on her tongue, like a pearl."
2. After locating Huitla at Leo Love's house, Arturo admires a beautiful evening that recycles pollution: "The day flames out in a smog-sunset, a wild gift of L. A."
3. To assist in the kitchen, Arturo wears his makeshift face mask: "I usually chop the onions, wearing ski goggles that Abuelita and I got at a yard sale."
4. After Ms. Cloud departs the school for lack of credentials, Mami works off frustration by going to the kitchen to make "a mole, complicated and dangerously spicy."
5. During the drive-by shooting, Arturo cites the rain of "plaster and glass and choking dust."
6. Huitla knows that a holiday is approaching. Rubbing the refrigerator, she "purrs like ten cats in one."

## Across the Curriculum

### Composition

1. Write a paragraph summarizing the importance of Christmas to the Rodriguezes. Why does the family celebrate by giving tamales to their friends? How do gifts recognize individual differences?
2. Prepare a conversation between Mami and Rosa on the basics of Mexican cooking, such as buying the black-green chiles, serving atole in mugs, grinding cilantro on a pitted stone, choosing spices for mole, and making sweet tamales.
3. Describe ways in which Papi shows his love. Contrast with a separate survey of the ways that Mami and Abuelita display affection and admiration for the family. Determine what children gain by living with parents and a grandparent.
4. Compose sentences that describe the uniqueness of Leo Love, Officer Paster, Coach Tree, Rat Nose, Ms. Cloud, Mama Dulce, Miss Pringle, Carlos, Pigeon Woman, Huitla, José, Raúl, and Alicia.

### Religion and Values

1. Make a wall chart of family holiday activities. Include feasting, making tamales, decorating a tree, drawing names from the cookie jar, and making presents for each other. What new activities does the Green Needle Gang add to the season?
2. Write a report on the Day of the Dead altar. List activities that people of all ages can join to celebrate the holiday.

### Drama

1. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of leaving gifts for Pigeon Woman and her children, receiving a pink lunch box from Officer Paster, retrieving Leo Love from the tree, playing the gourd with the Mega Mango, rescuing Valentín from a vacant lot, removing possums from the garbage can, grinding chiles on a pitted grinding stone, and hiding from bullets. Supply sketches of costumes and props, such as a gourd and stick, pink lunch box, Christmas tree and presents, cat in a tree, Studebaker, grinding stone, garbage, letter from a pen pal, telephone, chiles, guns, cars, trumpet, and police uniforms.
2. Create a storyboard account of Arturo's everyday activities. Including walking along the L. A. River, meeting with the Green Needle Gang, playing basketball at school, eating with his family, telephoning friends, reading books from Ms. Cloud's library, listening to Abuelita's prayers, and practicing with the band Mega Mango.



**Education**

1. Role-play the training of Mexican immigrants in basic education. Include reading, writing, English conversation, math, science, and discussion of home needs, transportation and driving laws, citizenship, finances, welfare, health care, the police, and current events from the *L. A. Times*.
2. Propose curriculum for a class to teach barrio children about their Aztec ancestors. Include flash cards with words in Náhuatl, particularly chocolate, avocado, and chicle, the basis of chewing gum.
3. Compile a parallel list of advantages and disadvantages to altering students' names. Why would Americanized names make intercultural friendship easier for non-Latino students? How does the arbitrary name change insult Arturo and his Latino friends?

**Speech**

1. Brainstorm ways of helping the police locate destructive gang members. Include barrio surveillance, license plate numbers, physical descriptions, names and nicknames, and places where the members congregate.
2. Compose a verbal or printed tour brochure of Veracruz. Explain why Raúl misses his homeland.
3. Outline a speech describing the complications brought on by moving to a new land and by functioning in a new language.

**Cinema**

1. View films about difficulties of living in a new place, such as *The Secret of NIMH*, *Watership Down*, *Babe*, *Pig in the City*, *J. T.*, *I Remember Mama*, *The Electric Grandmother*, *Stuart Little*, *Charlotte's Web*, and *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and dialogue to those of *Any Small Goodness*. Comment on scenes that illustrate celebrations and dependence on others for help and friendship.

**Science and Health**

1. List school science and health projects that introduce American classes to Spanish, such as an anatomy chart with bones and organs listed in Spanish and English or a CPR manual that identifies rib cage, sternum, jaw, mouth, tongue, and neck in Spanish and English.

**Geography and Culture**

1. Create a mural on Los Angeles. Locate places and streets with Spanish names, such as Alameda Street, San Bernardino Freeway, Olivo Street, La Brea Tar Pits, and Cesar E. Chavez Avenue.
2. Make an illustrated notebook of Mexican touches in clothing, art, music, food, holidays, worship, home decor, holiday celebrations, and daily customs. Include Christmas decorations and feasting, three-generation families, Day of the Dead designs, piñatas, family names, homemade presents, sipping mugs of atole, grinding chiles on a grinding stone, growing corn and harvesting corn fungus, telling stories about Aztecs and about Nahuatl gods and heroes, and giving tamales and chilies as gifts.

**Law**

1. Read aloud the proper way to use 911. Explain why the police are angry with Rosa Rodriguez for demanding help removing possums from garbage cans.
2. Set up a mock bi-lingual police bureau to help non-English-speaking people report gang threats, traffic violations, and drive-by shootings.

**Social Studies and Economics**

1. Discuss with a small group the Rodriguez family's behaviors, disappointments, and expectations, such as gifts for Valentine's Day, drawing names before Christmas, supporting the band Mega Mango, forming the Green Needle Gang, praying and remembering Grandfather Arturo, visiting the school library, and calling police for help.
2. Report orally on the physical and psychological effects of neighborhood crime. Explain why the family feels violated after a gang fires bullets into their residence.
3. Define isolation. Explain why Abuelita feels separated from her husband and why Leo Love becomes Rosa's pen pal and why he invites her to return with Huitla for a visit. How does pilfering from Coach Tree isolate José from the rest of the students?

**Psychology**

1. Describe aloud the effect of Coach Tree's work in exchange for one dollar. Explain why the students are fond of him.
2. List aspects of growing up that trouble Arturo, particularly having his name changed and being menaced by older guys.

- Using incidents from the book, comment on the family's treatment of its youngest member. Why does the family try to protect Rosa from terror of the drive-by shooting?
- Characterize the influence on Arturo of good deeds by Coach Tree, Officer Paster, Mama Dulce, Abuelita, Leo Love, the paper boy, and Ms. Cloud.

### Mathematics and Computers

- Using desktop publishing, make flash cards or a bulletin board that identifies these terms: Veracruz, modus operandi, perp, Aztec, glean, biblioteca, prodigy, mariachi, tactic, rodential, mole, apprise, pact, unfazed, browse, ecstatic, Jurassic, homage, emulate, desolate, blowfish, Mami, Papi, barrio, Náhuatl, random, hijos, percentage, sarape, borrados, gringo, bravura, muy, tentative, repertoire, gatita, rebozo, interloper, salud, pocho, disfavor, abuelita, cucaracha, millennium, molcajete, pulverize, assuage, cilantro, menudo, outlay, sequoia, and resplendent.

### Language

- Summarize in a brief speech the meaning of
- In a paragraph, explain how Nahuatl words and Aztec images survive from early times in Mexico. Include avocado, chile, chicle, chocolate, coyote, guacamole, huarache, jicama, mesquite, posole, tamale, and tomato. What do Aztec elements indicate about Central American pride? creativity? folklore?

### Literature

- Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, speeches, and stories that describe cultural islands within towns and cities. Include Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*, Walter Dean Myers's *The Blues of Flats Brown*, Jane Wagner's *J. T.*, Lawrence Yep's *Dragonwings*, Joseph Bruchac's *Bowman's Store*, Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, Joseph Krumboltz's *And Now Miguel*, Amy Tan's "Fish Cheeks," Theodore Taylor's *The Cay*, Yoko Kawashima Watkins's *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*, John Van Druten's *I Remember Mama*, and Carmen Deedy's *Growing Up Cuban*.
- Explain in a theme the significance of the title *Any Small Goodness*. Propose reasons why people beset by gangs, poverty, and crime are grateful for glimmers of generosity and kindness, particularly the replacement lunch box, a gift of chiles rellenos and the return of Huitla from the tree.
- Explain the role of a minor character, such as José, Rat Nose, Ms. Cloud, Miss Pringle, Alicia, furniture store workers, Mama Dulce, Pigeon Woman, the paperboy, firemen, Carlos, Raúl, and Lloyd. Create

a part for yourself, such as a classmate, neighbor, friend, library aide, police officer, grocer, or teacher.

## Alternate Assessment

- List examples of goodness in the lives of the characters, for example, the return of Huitla, Leo Love's pen pal letters to Rosa, Arturo's cactus plant for Abuelita, Luis's gift of a wooden Christmas tree for Arturo, Papi's painting of rocks for Mami, the Green Needle Gang's gifts to Pigeon Woman and her children, Ms. Cloud's reclamation of the school library, Abuelita's prayers for corn fungus, Coach Tree's volunteer teaching, Officer Paster's gift of a pink lunch box, Mama Dulce's free piano lessons, the students' thank-you parade for the new books, Carlos's driving for the gang, gifts of tamales for friends, Papi's refurbishment of Valentín, and Abuelita's cooking of menudo for barrio children.
- Compile a list of actions and statements that demonstrate choices, for example, Coach Tree's intent to help José rather than have him arrested, Arturo and his friends' demands for their names back, poor Mexicans' arrival in the United States in a truck, Mama Dulce's offer of free piano lessons, Arturo's playing of the gourd in the band Mega Mango, the school board's decision to fire Ms. Cloud, punks' firing of guns into the Rodriguez home, Leo Love's decision to risk allergies to rescue Huitla, and Mami's decision to call the police to remove the possum from the garbage can.
- Compose a scene in which Papi and Mami receive a thank-you visit from Pigeon Woman in acknowledgement of Arturo's Christmas gifts.
- Make a list of important settings, for example, band practice in the garage, Arturo's walk along the L. A. River, the window sill on which the pink lunch box is shot, playing for the dance in the high school gymnasium, the vacant lot where Papi finds an abandoned Studebaker, Abuelita's garden, Ms. Cloud's library, Miss Pringle's class, a ride up Olivo Street in Carlos's car, the gang's sneaking up to Pigeon Woman's porch, the street where older guys shove Arturo aside, Rosa's entry into first grade, Abuelita praying in the adjacent room, and basketball practice in the gym.
- Choose a role for yourself as a member of the Mega Mango band, on the police force, at the dance, on the basketball team, or in the barrio.

## Vocabulary

Underline appropriate words to complete each statement below:

1. Ms. Cloud disappears from the (**rebozo, biblioteca, outlay, sequoia**) and enters a chauffeured Jaguar.
2. Many (**ecstatic, tentative, random, resplendent**) bullets hit the house and destroy Rosa's pink lunch box.
3. Papi comes from a proud (**Aztec, unfazed, barrio, Veracruz**) heritage.
4. The Green Needle Gang uses a secretive (**borrados, interloper, modus operandi, cilantro**).
5. The family celebrates with mugs of (**mole, menudo, cucaracha, atole**).
6. Huitla is the Rodriguez family's beloved (**sarape, hijos, mariachi, gatita**).
7. Leaving a tree, presents, and food is a (**pact, browse, tactic, repertoire**) of the Green Needle Gang.
8. Leo Love, Huitla's savior, turns out to be a (**gringo, prodigy, perp, Náhuatl**).
9. Officer Paster tries to (**assuage, emulate, desolate, disfavor**) Rosa with a new lunch box.
10. Abuelita takes pride in preparing food on the (**salud, pocho, molcajete, bravura**).

**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. *Tlacuaches! Tlacuaches!*
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Shark's eye. Dare you to swallow it.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I can't count on my watch; I can't count on my car; I've got count on something.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Love each other. Help each other.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Theeess name Arter—eet burns in my earsss like poissson.
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Part II: True/False (20 points)**

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

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Carlos is the only member of the Green Needle Gang who can drive.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Coach Tree tries to help José, the thief who sells stolen momentos.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Papi misses only a few days of work at the furniture store until the drive-by shooting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. In the other room, Arturo's grandmother addresses her dead husband.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Rosa thinks her Christmas gift to Luis should be a secret, even though it is pink.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The paperboy tells the Rodriguezes that Leo stayed in the tree until Huitla could be rescued.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. In the pink lunch box is a letter from Leo Love, Rosa's pen pal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The dance comes to a halt when José leads his gang toward Miss Pringle.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Valentín is probably a stolen vehicle abandoned by a gang in a vacant lot.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Mami's choice of a gift is a small wooden Christmas tree to hang from a bough.

## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part III: Completion (20 points)

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

1. Arturo follows \_\_\_\_\_ from the library and sees her enter a chauffeur-driven \_\_\_\_\_ automobile.
2. Abuelita offers \_\_\_\_\_ a lime and hugs him for finding \_\_\_\_\_.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ plays trumpet and Arturo scrapes a gourd in a band called Mega \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The family \_\_\_\_\_ is named for corn \_\_\_\_\_, a Mexican delicacy.
5. Arturo summons his friends, who swear on the \_\_\_\_\_ to regain their \_\_\_\_\_.

### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe the activities that Arturo prefers.
2. Explain why the police are angry at Mami.
3. Discuss the importance of small goodnesses to the Rodriguez family.
4. List and describe foods that are important to the Rodriguezes.
5. Summarize events that precede the drive-by shooting.

## 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.

- |                |              |                 |
|----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| A. Coach Tree  | F. Ms. Cloud | K. wise man     |
| B. Jaime       | G. José      | L. Arturo       |
| C. Luis        | M. Mami Rosa | M. Miss Pringle |
| D. Papi Arturo | I. Leo Love  | N. Leona Scott  |
| E. Edmond      | J. Abuelita  | O. Carlos       |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. tries to help José
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. brags about making menudo
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. scrapes a gourd
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. fears possums
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. drives the band to school
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. reads *The Count of Monte Cristo*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. pledges himself to vengeance
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. lacks credentials
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. suffers from allergies
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. drives the getaway car
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. plays the trumpet
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. a gift
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. "The Esteemed One"
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Mama Dulce
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. weeps for the poor

### 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 prays to Jesús and native gods?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. What is the language of the Aztec?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. What does Arturo dread at school?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. From whom does José steal?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. When does Papi paint rocks?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. What does Papi name the car?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Who gives a cactus as a gift?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. What is the bird made of?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Who is a widow?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. What names translates as "bear"?

## 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. Papi
- A. finds a stolen Studebaker.
  - B. plays dominos at noon.
  - C. needs a pen pal.
  - D. removes the possum from the can.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Arturo
- A. bears his grandfather's name.
  - B. leads a parade from the library.
  - C. does not make the basketball team.
  - D. hides from the policeman with the flashlight.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Abuelita
- A. swears on her grinding stone.
  - B. builds a Day of the Dead altar in the kitchen.
  - C. lures Huitla out of the tree with a catnip bird.
  - D. takes chiles rellenos to Coach Tree.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Pigeon Woman
- A. gives free piano lessons.
  - B. makes tamales for holidays.
  - C. welcomes gifts for her children.
  - D. calls the police to Olivo Street.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Raúl
- A. becomes Ralph.
  - B. buys a blooming cactus.
  - C. locates Leo's house.
  - D. knows illegal Mexican immigrants killed on the highway.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Mami
- A. accompanies Arturo to the library.
  - B. laughs at Coach Tree eating a hot chile.
  - C. paints red hearts on rocks.
  - D. dislikes living in a barrio.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Rosa
- A. is named for Abuelita.
  - B. enters first grade.
  - C. calls 911.
  - D. hears a noise in the garbage.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Huitla
- A. loves limes.
  - B. sells stolen items.
  - C. plays the piano for Mama Dulce.
  - D. is named for fungus.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Ms. Cloud
- A. insults Alicia's name.
  - B. is named in the L. A. Times obituaries.
  - C. welcomes students to a pile of books.
  - D. chaperones the dance.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Officer Paster
- A. arrests boys in the bushes.
  - B. drives down Olivo Street looking for gangs.
  - C. receives a statue of the Virgencita.
  - D. brings Rosa a lunch box.

### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain how Coach Tree builds confidence.
2. Contrast Mami, Papi, and Abuelita as role models.
3. Describe rehearsals of Mega Mango.
4. Account for the importance of corn fungus to the family.
5. Explain Rosa's reaction to the pink lunch box.

## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY

- |                   |               |
|-------------------|---------------|
| 1. biblioteca     | 6. gatita     |
| 2. random         | 7. tactic     |
| 3. Aztec          | 8. gringo     |
| 4. modus operandi | 9. assuage    |
| 5. atole          | 10. molcajete |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

1. Mami, screaming out of fear of possums
2. Rat Nose, in a dare to Arturo in exchange for fifty cents
3. Coach, in a pep talk to the basketball team
4. Mama Dulce, speaking her motto to her piano students
5. Abuelita, responding to Arturo's renaming at school

#### Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

#### Part III: Completion (20 points)

1. Ms. Cloud, Jaguar
2. Leo, Huitla
3. Luis, Mango
4. cat, fungus
5. grinding stone, names

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Matching (30 points)

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

#### Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

- |                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Abuelita        | 6. Valentín       |
| 2. Náhuatl         | 7. Arturo         |
| 3. basketball      | 8. old pajamas    |
| 4. Coach Tree      | 9. Abuelita       |
| 5. Valentine's Day | 10. Arthur/Arturo |

#### Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

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

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

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