

## Approved for use in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade English

### Summary of the Work:

From *Gale Cengage Learning*

Santiago is awakened by his mother who tells him to run as the soldiers have come to kill them. Snatching up his sister Angelina, the two escape the killings of their parents, siblings and grandfather. Told by their dying uncle to use his boat to travel to the United States and tell their story, the two ride on horseback to Lake Izabal where they find his homemade kayak. A neighbor helps stock it with food and, receiving some sailing instructions, the two children sail past Belize into the Gulf of Mexico and then to Florida. The three weeks on the sea are filled with terror as they battle storms, pirates, and the lack of food until finally landing on a Florida beach. Told to leave the private beach, Santiago and Angelina are eventually taken in by more kindly Americans and tell their story to immigration officials of events that occurred often in Central America during the 1980s.

### Rationale:

This text is to be used in a literature circle setting, where students will choose to read this text among others on and about Latin America. Students will research the history, culture, customs, music, art, architecture, etc. of the setting of this novel. They will discuss the text, its issues, and present on the book and their research to the rest of the class.

### Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

From *School Library Journal*

Grade 5-9-When soldiers burn his Guatemalan village and kill his family, 12-year-old Santiago escapes with his 4-year-old sister, Angelina. Following the instructions of his dying uncle, he makes his way to Lake Izabal, where he takes his uncle's small sailing canoe and begins a terrifying journey north and across the Gulf of Mexico to Florida. The siblings face starvation and dehydration; lack of sleep; strong sun, wind, and waves; and their own fears and sorrows to win their game of *Staying Alive*. The present-tense narrative suggests the speech of someone whose first language is not English, and Santiago's first-person account makes the adventure even more immediate. The opening scene is memorable, as the burning of the village turns the night sky red. However, the necessary flashback to explain how a mountain boy learned rudimentary sailing and the almost unbelievable details of the children's trip between their village and their uncle's home give readers pause, rather than pulling them into the suspense of the story. At times, the anger in the author's message almost overwhelms the action. "The rich have no conscience," their uncle's friend says. The first Americans they encounter call them "stinking boat people" and tell them to go away from their private beach club. In an afterword, the author explains that the soldiers who massacred villagers were armed by the U.S. government as part of our fight against communism. Thus, we share the blame for such atrocities. In spite of the heavy-handed message, readers who persevere through the first third of the book will be rewarded with a terrific survival story.

\* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

\* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

### Noted Distinction:

[Notable Books for a Global Society 2003](#)

[Young Adults' Choices for 2004: A Project of the International Reading Association](#)

### Readability:

- Lexile Score: 690L
- Readability Level:

### Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

### Standard Alignment:

#### Literature:

Content Standard 1—Students construct meaning as they comprehend, interpret, analyze and respond to literary works.

Content Standard 2—Students recognize and evaluate how language, literary devices, and elements contribute to the meaning and impact of literary works.

Content Standard 3—Students reflect upon their literary experiences and purposefully select from a range of works.

Content Standard 4—Students interact with print and nonprint literary works from various cultures, ethnic groups, traditional and contemporary viewpoints written by both genders.

Content Standard 5—Students use literary works to enrich personal experience and to connect to the broader world of ideas, concepts and issues.

#### Writing:

Content Standard 1—Students write clearly and effectively.

Content Standard 2—Students apply a range of skills and strategies in the writing process.

Content Standard 3—Students evaluate and reflect on their growth as writers.

	<p>Content Standard 4—Students write for a variety of purposes and audiences.</p> <p>Content Standard 5—Students recognize the structures of various forms and apply these characteristics to their own writing.</p> <p>Content Standard 6—Students use the inquiry process, problem-solving strategies, and resources to synthesize and communicate information.</p> <p><b>Reading:</b></p> <p>Content Standard 1—Students construct meaning as they comprehend, interpret, and respond to what they read.</p> <p>Content Standard 2—Students apply a range of skills and strategies to read.</p> <p>Content Standard 3—Students set goals, monitor, and evaluate their progress in reading.</p> <p>Content Standard 4—Students select, read, and respond to print and nonprint material for a variety of purposes.</p> <p>Content Standard 5—Students gather, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information from a variety of sources, and communicate their findings in ways appropriate for their purposes and audiences.</p> <p><b>Speaking:</b></p> <p>Standard 1—Students demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the communication process.</p> <p>Content Standard 2—Students distinguish among and use appropriate types of speaking and listening for a variety of purposes.</p> <p>Content Standard 3—Students apply a range of skills and strategies to speaking and listening.</p> <p>Content Standard 4—Students identify, analyze, and evaluate the impacts of effective speaking and evaluative listening.</p> <p><b>Approval:</b></p> <p><b>Submitted to Committee:</b></p> <p><b>Approved for Adoption:</b></p>
<p><b>Notes on the Text:</b></p> <p><i>(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)</i></p> <p>This is an amazing book. It is fast paced, heart felt, and has a strong lead character. He and his little sister have to flee death and witnessed the slaughter of their entire family, and to survive, they must risk death to live. It is action packed, but it really begs the question of what happened in Guatemala in the 1980's. It would be a great book for a group of guys, and it also lends itself well to the creation of models of objects within the book. The opening scenes may be objectionable, because his entire family is slaughtered. Mikaelson doesn't describe the situation with any gore, but all the horror is intact. I find this book less shocking than most Holocaust memoirs, which are more graphic in their real violence, so the only real difference would be that these people are Guatemalans suffering the wrath of genocide.</p>	<p><b>Connection to the Curriculum:</b></p> <p>Please see rationale.</p>
<p><b>Additional Connections:</b></p> <p><i>(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)</i></p>	