

Approved for use in 8th Grade English

Summary of the Work:

From Gale Cengage Learning

Based on stories from the author's life, this collection of nine shares daily events of Mexican American families living in the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas. When the "California Cousins" come to visit, their Texas cousins are ready with booby-trapped outhouses. Though Harry complains about his grandfather when the family lives together, it's "Papa Lalo" who buys him a tuxedo to wear to the *quinceanera* parties. Pedro is taught to be an altar boy by Father Bob's two current altar boys who more closely resemble bodyguards in "Last Mass." Other stories describe the "Crazy Loco" dog that liked to sit behind the wheel or the chance a young girl receives for an education in "She Flies" in a spirited collection.

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

Gr 7 Up—Two great strengths of these stories are the pitch-perfect sense for the speech and thought patterns of teens and the vivid depiction of the daily lives of Mexican-Americans in Texas's Rio Grande Valley. One story focuses on two small-town boys trying to cope when their older and more sophisticated California cousins come to visit. Another is about the loving relationship between a girl and her great-aunt, a midwife who retires at age 85 after her grand-niece is born. Another tells of a teen who resents having to move in with his grandfather after his parents' divorce and having to adapt to the old man's ways. Rice highlights the details of these ordinary lives—including Spanish words and phrases as well as Catholic practices—while still revealing the universal patterns behind the cultural particularities. The strongest stories here—"Last Mass," "Her Other Son," and "Papa Lalo"—also display a firm control of narrative and dramatic unity, drawing readers on to emotionally satisfying but not predictable conclusions. In the weaker stories, the insights and the voice are still sharp, but the narratives are less compelling. Even so, this is a powerful collection that should enjoy a wide audience.

* 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:

Expert Picks:

[ALA's "Best" Lists: 2002](#)

[The Best, Notable & Recommended for 2001](#)

[Notable Books for a Global Society 2002](#)

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 830L
- 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.

Content Standard 4—Students write for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Content Standard 5—Students recognize the structures of various forms and apply these characteristics to their own writing.

	<p>Content Standard 6—Students use the inquiry process, problem-solving strategies, and resources to synthesize and communicate information.</p> <p>Reading:</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>Speaking:</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>Approval: Submitted to Committee: Approved for Adoption:</p>
<p>Notes on the Text: <i>(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)</i></p> <p>Rice is an excellent story teller. This collection of short stories is rich in culture, humanity, and real situations we all have found ourselves in. He doesn't hold punches, nor hugs. They are deep with metaphor and imagery. I'd use these stories in a heartbeat. On the downside, they don't have a deep connection to any one place. For that reason, they are just about Mexican-Americans, which is a drawback because you can't point on a map and say, "here's where the story happened". I didn't find anything offensive in the book, nor anything that could be even thought of to be offensive.</p>	<p>Connection to the Curriculum:</p> <p>Please see rationale.</p>
<p>Additional Connections: <i>(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)</i></p>	