



A Standards-aligned Educator's Guide for Ages 12-18

AMERICAN ROAD TRIP

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Publisher: A Christy Ottaviano Book
(An imprint of Henry Holt & Co.)

Age Range: 12 to 18

Grade Levels: 7 to 12

★ "... powerful story." ~*Booklist*, starred review

★ "... celebrates many things: family love, realized dreams, and the taste of a green chile cheeseburger." ~ *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★ "... re-imagines the American road trip as an individual journey, one deeply anchored in sacrifice for those we love." ~ *School Library Journal*, starred review

About the book:

With a strong family, the best friend a guy could ask for, and a budding romance with the girl of his dreams, life shows promise for Teodoro "T" Avila. But he takes some hard hits the summer before senior year when his nearly perfect brother, Manny, returns from a tour in Iraq with a devastating case of PTSD. In a desperate effort to save Manny from himself and pull their family back together, T's fiery sister, Xochitl, hoodwinks her brothers into a cathartic road trip.

Told through T's honest voice, this is a candid exploration of mental illness, socioeconomic pressures, and the many inescapable highs and lows that come with growing up—including falling in love.

About the author:

Patrick Flores-Scott is a former public school teacher and current stay-at-home dad and early morning writer in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Patrick's goal for his first novel, *Jumped In*, was to write a story that would engage struggling readers. *Jumped In* has been named to the 2014 YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults list, a Walden Award finalist, a Washington Book Award winner, an NCSS/CBC Notable Book for the Social Studies, and a Bank Street College Best Books of 2014. Learn more about Patrick by accessing www.patrickfloresscott.com.



Discussion questions:

Then she points at me. "What's Manny gonna think when he sees you, you big lazy clown. There's a world out there, T. Find a passion. Set a goal. And go for it, bro! (11)"

- Explore reasons why Xochitl owns the authority to accuse Teodoro in this way. Identify her passion and goals.
- Tell why Xochitl is concerned what Manny might think of Teodoro's lack of motivation. Why is it important for Manny to be pleased with Teodoro's initiative?
- Examine Xochitl's concern about Teodoro. Is she embarrassed of him being a "lazy clown"? If not, describe her feelings for him.
- Determine why Teodoro feels that having Manny home "is the only thing that can get us right" (11).

But maybe the real reason I'm hiding all this is cuz when I blow it, it'll be easier to quit if no one knows I tried (30).

- Determine why Teodoro seems stuck in a feeling of failure. Tell why he expects so little of himself.
- Why is he so sure that he will "blow it"?
- Teodoro has known Wendy for most of his life. Explore reasons why he feels the need to lie about his college aspirations at this time. What has changed to cause him to react in this way?
- Examine the phrase "...it'll be easier to quit when no one knows I tried." Who is the *no one* he is referring to?
- A *slacker* is defined as someone who is apathetic and resistant to work. Identify what is required to inspire a slacker to make significant positive changes.

Discussion continued:

There's a part of me that's there, with everyone, enjoying it all. But another part of me is floating above the table. I'm seeing how we look and hearing how we sound, counting us and thinking, *Finally, this is us*" (83).

- The word *finally* suggests that after a long, difficult time of being apart, Teodoro believes that his family is complete and that all is well. Consider this scene from Manny's point of view. Predict how he might be feeling at this moment in the story.
- Immediately after this happy moment, Manny's hand shakes uncontrollably, spilling drink on the tabletop. Predict what this action suggests.
- Notice that the family responded to Manny's shaking in comical way. Explain why.

I tell myself, *It's a little joy ride. She just wants to show off the car. No big deal.*

But my gut is telling me to step away from the car. And run fast (116).

- The word *premonition* means to have a strong feeling that something is unpleasant about to happen. Up to this point in the story, Teodoro has been goal-oriented, laser-focused on his academic goal. Explain what he chose to go with Xochitl and Manny instead of responding to his premonition that it would be a bad idea to do so.
- Consider the motivation behind Xochitl's decision to basically kidnap Teodoro. Is she justified in doing so? How so?
- Examine the similarities and differences of Manny's state of being at this point in the story and Teodoro's in the first part of the story. Explore reasons why they both seemed unmotivated, lazy, and reclusive.

I'm still holding Manny's arm. He's shaking all over. His face is white ash. Skin wrinkled. It's the first time I notice how thin his hair is. And his eyes. Manny is someplace else (169).

- Prior to attending Rudi's funeral, Xochitl shared Manny's suicide note with Teodoro. Consider the connection between Manny's death wish and Rudi's passing.
- Examine how Manny's physical features reveal the affects of PTSD and Teodoro's acceptance of this.
- Discuss the impact that this setting plays in each characters' emotional development.

"It makes sense if it's some abstract people hiding stuff from each other. But it's *us*, Teodoro." Tears start rolling down her face. She looks like somebody just died (235).

- Teodoro is surprised to find out that Xochitl exposed all of his secrets. Wendy has known about his lies about U-Dub, and yet seems to care, deeply, for him. Explore similarities between Xochitl and Wendy's desires to sacrifice to assure that their loved ones do not face challenges alone.
- Explain why, despite of all of the hardships and set-backs Teodoro experienced throughout the story, facing the truth with Wendy is his most defining moment.
- Throughout the story, Teodoro's primary motivation was to win Wendy's heart by becoming someone more worthy of her affection. Were his efforts necessary or justified? Explain your answer.

"Well, Xochitl Avila, I did not tell you the truth because if I had"—I take a big breath and let it out—"you never would have come" (306).

- Explain the significance of Teodoro's use *Avila*, of their family name, in this scene.
- Identify ways that Manny and Teodoro secretly switched supporting roles with Xochitl. Explore reasons why they did so.
- Explore the depths of love and commitment Teodoro, Manny, and Xochitl shared. Identify moments of sacrifice, deception, acceptance, fear, and perservance that ultimately led them to trust, appreciation, and devotion.

Extension Activity:

Write an expository essay exploring the connection between the book cover and the story. Interpret how the tagline "Where do you go when war comes home?" summarizes the premise. Consider how the graphic communicates the following aspects of the story.

- | | |
|-------------|---------------------------|
| • Theme | • Action |
| • Character | • Conflict |
| • Scope | • Effective use of color |
| • Setting | • Effective use of layout |

Present essay to the class.



Thematic Expression

A theme is the central idea of the story, one that often describes an issue that runs through the story. In *AMERICAN ROAD TRIP*, Teodoro and Xochitl demonstrated differing expressions of universal themes such as passion, initiative, sacrifice, and forgiveness. For example, with regard to the theme of *initiative*, early in the story Teodoro lacked initiative while Xochitl was on fire with enthusiasm for her music. As a result of different story events, catalysts for change, their expressions of the shared theme switched. They demonstrated *initiative* in opposite ways. Teodoro became a focused, diligent student while Xochitl tabled her dreams to care for Manny.

Analyze Teodoro and Xochitl's varying demonstrations of a shared themes by using the graphic organizer below as a guide. Choose a theme from the list below. State how each character demonstrated the theme in the early part of the story. Describe how they expressed the theme at the end of the story. Identify the story event that occurred to being about the change. Write an essay comparing and contrasting the characters' altered roles. Share work with the class.

Understanding
Compassion
Forgiveness

Passion
Goals
Initiative

Secrecy
Sacrifice
Commitment

Theme _____

Teodoro	Xochitl
Initially expressed?	Initially expressed?
Catalyst for change?	Catalyst for change?
Ultimately demonstrated?	Ultimately demonstrated?

