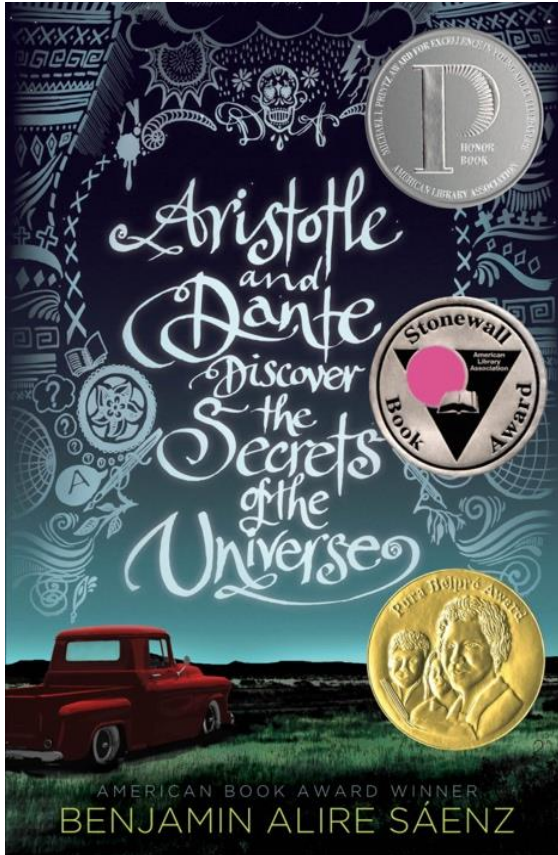


ARISTOTLE & DANTE
DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF
THE UNIVERSE

BY BENJAMIN ALIRE SÁENZ





ARISTOTLE & DANTE DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE

AUTHOR: BENJAMIN ALIRE SÁENZ

GENRE: Fiction

PAGE COUNT: 359

LEXILE LEVEL: 380

TOPICS: Relationships; Sexuality; Friendship; Family; Identity; Loneliness; Trauma; Violence; Anger

ABOUT THE BOOK

Aristotle is an angry teen with a brother in prison. Dante is a know-it-all who has an unusual way of looking at the world. When the two meet at the swimming pool, they seem to have nothing in common. But as the loners start spending time together, they discover that they share a special friendship—the kind that changes lives and lasts a lifetime. And it is through this friendship that Ari and Dante will learn the most important truths about themselves and the kind of people they want to be. (Source: Goodreads)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Benjamin Alire Sáenz (born 16 August 1954) is an award-winning American poet, novelist and writer of children's books. He was born at Old Picacho, New Mexico, the fourth of seven children, and was raised on a small farm near Mesilla, New Mexico. He graduated from Las Cruces High School in 1972. That fall, he entered St. Thomas Seminary in Denver, Colorado where he received a B.A. degree in Humanities and Philosophy in 1977. He studied Theology at the University of Louvain in Leuven, Belgium from 1977 to 1981. He was a priest for a few years in El Paso, Texas before leaving the order. In 1985, he returned to school, and studied English and Creative Writing at the University of Texas at El Paso where he earned an M.A. degree in Creative Writing. He then spent a year at the University of Iowa as a PhD student in American Literature. His first novel, *Carry Me Like Water* was a saga that brought together the Victorian novel and the Latin American tradition of magic realism and received much critical attention. In *The Book of What Remains* (Copper Canyon Press, 2010), his fifth book of poems, he writes to the core truth of life's ever-shifting memories. Set along the Mexican border, the contrast between the desert's austere beauty and the brutality of border politics mirrors humanity's capacity for both generosity and cruelty. He continues to teach in the Creative Writing Department at the University of Texas at El Paso. (Source: Goodreads)

ABOUT THE CURRICULUM GUIDE

This curriculum guide is a resource to be used over 6 weeks. Educators can create a more meaningful reading experience for their students by leading them through a close read that connects the book to their own lives and the world.

The guide includes:

- weekly reading comprehension checks
- discussion questions with text analysis
- writing prompts
- research topics
- projects
- supplemental texts & media

SECTION 1

PAGES: The Different Rules of Summer (pages 1-56)

FOCUS: Loneliness; Personhood

PREVIEW: Project – Find a poem about the universe. Draw a circle to represent a telescope lens and your interpretation of the poem inside.

SECTION 2

PAGES: Sparrows Falling from the Sky (pages 59-107)

FOCUS: Identity; Parents

PREVIEW: Research Topic: Second-Generation Immigrants – Compare the findings from your research to the struggles that Aristotle and Dante face.

SECTION 3

PAGES: The End of Summer (pages 111-154)

FOCUS: Anger; Evolving Relationships

PREVIEW: Write about a time you were angry. Be sure to include what you learned.

SECTION 4

PAGES: Letters on a Page (pages 157-232)

FOCUS: Internal Conflict; Dreams

PREVIEW: Ari's dreams are very prominent. Record your own dreams in the morning and write about what they could represent.

SECTION 5

PAGES: Remember the Rain (pages 235-294)

FOCUS: Ecotone; Love & Loyalty

PREVIEW: In groups, analyze major symbols in the novel.

SECTION 6

PAGES: All the Secrets of the Universe (pages 297-359)

FOCUS: Character Development

PREVIEW: Write – Looking back at the story, how has this ending and Ari's feelings for Dante been foreshadowed?

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

The prompts and activities in this guide are aligned with Common Core. Here are some of the key standards:

READING LITERATURE:

- 9-10.1, 11-12.1
- 9-10.2, 11-12.2
- 9-10.3, 11-12.3
- 9-10.4, 11-12.4
- 9-10.5, 11-12.5

SPEAKING & LISTENING:

- 9-10.1, 11-12.1
- 9-10.2, 11-12.2
- 9-10.4, 11-12.4

WRITING:

- 9-10.1, 11-12.1
- 9-10.2, 11-12.2
- 9-10.3, 11-12.3
- 9-10.4, 11-12.4
- 9-10.7, 11-12.4
- 9-10.8, 11-12.8
- 9-10.9, 11-12.9

www.corestandards.org

SECTION 1 GUIDE

READING CHECK

Use these simple comprehension questions to check that your students have completed their reading assignment for this section and understand what they read:

1. Why doesn't Aristotle's family talk about his older brother?
2. Where do Dante and Aristotle meet? What does Dante teach Aristotle?
3. What does Dante need to do when he invites Aristotle back to his house?
4. What did Dante bring as a gift to Aristotle's dad?
5. What did the boys do when Mr. and Mrs. Quintana took them to the desert?
6. What do the boys do with their shoes in the street?
7. What happened in the park that upset Dante so much?

Answer Key

1. He is in prison.
2. They meet at the swimming pool. Dante teaches Aristotle how to swim.
3. He needs to clean his room.
4. A book about Mexican painters and their art.
5. They looked at the stars through Dante's telescope.
6. They developed a game to play by throwing them around.
7. They caught some boys shooting at birds with a BB gun.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TEXT ANALYSIS

1. Read and analyze: *"Maybe Richie Valens died young - but he did something. I mean, he really did something. Me? What have I done?" "You have time," she said... "Well, you have to become a person first," I said.* (Ch. 2, pg. 7-8)
 - What does it mean to "really do something"?
 - What are Aristotle's goals in and expectations of life? Are they realistic? Explain your answer.
 - Aristotle's mother reassures him that he has time to do something. Is she correct? Why or why not?
 - How do you define "a person"? How do you become one? Does a child count as a person?
 - Is Aristotle correct when he says that he has to become a person first before he can do something? Why or why not?
2. Read and analyze: *"It was a small idea. But at least the idea was mine."* (Ch. 2, pg. 9)
 - What does this quote reveal about Aristotle's character?
 - What is the value in having your own ideas?
 - What stops Aristotle from having and acting on his own ideas more often? What stops any person from having and acting on their own ideas?
3. Read and analyze: *"All on my own. I was in love with that phrase."* (Ch. 4, pg. 15)
 - Why is this phrase something that Aristotle loves?
 - Aristotle mentions being a lonely guy many times in this section. What is the difference between being alone and being lonely?
 - Is being alone a bad thing? Why or why not? Is being lonely a bad thing? Why or why not?

SECTION 1
ARISTOTLE & DANTE
DISCOVER THE
SECRETS OF THE
UNIVERSE

CHAPTERS/PAGES:
The Different Rules of
Summer
Pages 1-56

FOCUS:

- Loneliness
- Personhood

4. Aristotle and Dante share the names of two very famous and very different philosophers. (Ch. 4, pg. 17-20)

- What power, if any, does one's name play in life?
- What do the boys' names and/or their thoughts about their names reveal about their characters?
- Dante mentions using a nickname in the past (Ch. 4, pg. 18). Can you be true to yourself while using a nickname? Explain your answer. In what situations might a nickname be more empowering than a given name?
- How similar and different are Dante and Aristotle and their perspective on life?

See Research Topics – Aristotle & Dante: The Philosophers.

5. Read and analyze: "My father gave me a strange look. 'It's your life,' he said." (Ch. 4, pg. 23)

- How does Aristotle feel about his life? Is he the one in control? Explain your answer.
- What is the relationship between Aristotle and his father? From what you've read so far, how does this relationship impact Aristotle?

6. Read and analyze: "I'd never met a Mexican-American man who as an English professor. I didn't know they existed." (Ch. 5, pg. 24)

- What does this quote reveal about the society and world Aristotle lives in?
- Is it important to see diversity in different fields and careers? Why or why not?
- What type of impact can this revelation have on an individual, especially a child?

7. Aristotle refuses to accept others' comments and praise about him. (Ch. 7, pg. 35)

- What does this reveal about his character? About how he sees himself?
- Why would Aristotle refuse compliments? Is this a good or bad quality to have? Explain your answer.

8. Read and analyze: "I didn't hear a word. Something happened inside me as I looked out into the vast universe. Through the telescope, the world was closer and larger than I'd ever imagined...it made me aware that there was something inside of me that mattered." (Ch. 10, pg. 42)

- What changed for Aristotle to start thinking this way? How did seeing something so vast help him determine that there was a part of him that mattered?
- What do you think "the secrets of the universe" are that Dante refers to? Can the secrets of the universe be discovered? Should they be discovered? Why or why not?

See Projects – The Universe for a related activity.

9. Read and analyze: "I thought about birds and the meaning of their existence. Dante had an answer. I didn't...I'd never even asked myself the question...I had a philosopher's name. What was my answer?" (Ch. 12, pg. 55)

- Is it important to ask these types of questions? Why or why not?
- Does Aristotle feel pressure from his name? In what way?
- Why is it important for Aristotle to discover his own answer? Why can't he just accept Dante's even though it makes sense?

WRITING PROMPTS

1. Aristotle & Dante

Compare and contrast Aristotle and Dante and their perspectives on life as well as their families. In your response, explore how their families have influenced their perspectives. Using examples from the text, write a paragraph comparing the boys and two paragraphs on the differences they have. Write a fourth paragraph exploring how these similarities and differences help Aristotle and Dante develop a friendship.

2. Loneliness

Aristotle defines himself by his loneliness. Write one paragraph answering the following question: Why is Aristotle lonely? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

RESEARCH TOPICS

Aristotle & Dante: The Philosophers

The two main characters of the novel are named after famous philosophers.

Research:

- When did the philosophers Aristotle and Dante live? Where did they live?
- What were their major contributions to philosophy? Summarize their beliefs.
- Name all of the influential texts they wrote.

Refer back to the text:

- What similarities and differences do you see between the philosophers and the characters in this book? Is Aristotle Mendoza at all similar to Aristotle the Philosopher? Why or why not? Is Dante Quintana at all similar to Dante Alighieri? Why or why not?
- Create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting that philosopher and his beliefs with the character named after them. Present your Venn diagram to the rest of the class.
- Why do you think the author chose these names for his characters?

PROJECTS

The Universe

Materials Needed: internet access, paper, writing utensils, coloring utensils

Dante has a revelation when looking at the universe through a telescope. *“I didn’t hear a word. Something happened inside me as I looked out into the vast universe. Through the telescope, the world was closer and larger than I’d ever imagined...it made me aware that there was something inside of me that mattered.” (Ch. 10, pg. 42)*

1. Search the internet for a poem you relate to that includes themes of astronomy, space, the universe, or stars.
2. On a blank piece of paper draw a big circle. Imagine this circle is the eyepiece of a telescope. Inside the circle, draw a representation of how this poem makes you feel. This can be a literal representation of the poem or something more abstract.

SECTION 2 GUIDE

READING CHECK

Use these simple comprehension questions to check that your students have completed their reading assignment for this section and understand what they read:

1. Why did Aristotle stay home for a long time in the beginning of the section?
2. What did Dante leave for Aristotle when he went to visit?
3. What did Aristotle dream about during his illness?
4. In his journal, what does Aristotle write about his brother?
5. What did Dante do when he saw the bird with the broken wing?

Answer Key

1. He was sick with the flu.
2. A drawing of Aristotle's chair.
3. His brother and father.
4. How his brother doesn't have any pictures in the house and no one talks about him.
5. He went out to the middle of the street to pick it up.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TEXT ANALYSIS

1. When he is sick, Aristotle has dreams about his father and Dante. *"I thought of my dreams... Dante, my dad. And I wondered what my dad looked like when he was my age. My mother had told me he was beautiful. I wonder if he'd been as beautiful as Dante. And I wondered why I thought that."* (Ch. 1, pg. 62-63)

- What do these dreams symbolize about Aristotle and his relationship to his dad? What about his relationship to Dante? Why do you think his father and Dante are so intertwined in his dreams?
- What does Aristotle mean when he says that he is always searching for his dad?
- What does Ari's illness reveal about his father and their relationship?

See Writing Prompts – Parental Relationships for a related activity.

2. Read and analyze: *"I wanted to tell her that happy was hard for me."* (Ch. 3, pg. 70)

- What does Aristotle mean by this statement? How can this be a difficult thing to accomplish?
- What does it mean to be happy?
- Why is being happy difficult for Aristotle? What does it take for Aristotle to be happy? What are some things that have made him happy so far in the novel? Cite evidence from the text.

3. Read and analyze: *"There was something sad and solitary about the sketch and I wondered if that's the way he saw the world or if that's the way he saw my world."* (Ch. 4, pg. 74)

- How can a drawing hold emotion? Have you ever seen a picture or drawing and seen emotion in it? Describe the experience.
- Why do you think Dante gave Ari a sketch of a chair? Why did he draw it the way he did?
- What does this sketch reveal about Dante's character and perspective? About Aristotle's?
- What does Aristotle mean when he says *"the way he saw my world"*?

SECTION 2
ARISTOTLE & DANTE
DISCOVER THE
SECRETS OF THE
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CHAPTERS/PAGES:
Sparrows Falling from
the Sky
Pages 59-107

FOCUS:

- Identity
- Parents

4. Read and analyze: *“I also knew I had inherited the name of the world’s most famous philosopher. I hated that. Everyone expected something from me...So I renamed myself Ari. If I switched the letters, my name was Air. I thought it might be a great thing to be the air. I could be something and nothing at the same time. I could be necessary and also invisible. Everyone would need me and no one would be able to see me.”* (Ch. 7, pg. 84)

- What kind of pressure and/or influence does one’s name play in life?
- Would people expect things from Ari regardless of his name? Why or why not?
- Does giving himself a nickname remove the expectations placed on him? Why or why not?
- Why does Aristotle want to be air? What value does he see in being “*necessary and also invisible*”? (Ch. 7, pg. 84) Do you agree with him that this would be a great thing? Why or why not?

See *Projects – My Fullest Name* for a text-to-self activity on this topic.

5. Read and analyze: *“It’s like my mom and dad created a whole new world for themselves. I live in their new world. But they understand the old world, the world they came from - and I don’t. I don’t belong anywhere. That’s the problem.”* (Ch. 8, pg. 88)

- Dante and Ari are both children of immigrants. Yet, they have different views and connections to their Mexican heritage. What is the cause of these differences?
- Dante does not feel like he is a proper Mexican. Why does he feel this way?
- Why does Dante feel like he doesn’t belong anywhere? Does Dante exist in the new or old world? Why?

See *Research Topics – Second-Generation Immigrants* to add more context.

6. Read and analyze: *“That was the first time that I really saw my mother as a person. A person who was so much more than just my mother.”* (Ch. 9, pg. 90)

- What causes Aristotle to see his mother as a person in this moment? Explain your answer.
- Why do children never see their parents as people until they are older?

7. Read and analyze: *“When she was being my mother, she had a lot of ideas about who I should be...I didn’t think it was my job to accept what everyone said I was and who I should be.”* (Ch. 10, pg. 92)

- What does this passage reveal about Aristotle’s character?
- Why do people, adults especially, feel the need to give input into who someone should be?
- Is Ari correct to not accept what people say about him? Why or why not?

WRITING PROMPTS

1. Identity

Aristotle and Dante come from a Mexican heritage and have a Mexican-American identity. How does each boy connect to their Mexican heritage? What difficulties does each face? Using examples from the text, write two paragraphs, one for each character, answering the questions above. In a third paragraph, explore how you relate to and connect with Dante and/or Aristotle.

2. Parental Relationships

Aristotle and Dante have very different relationships with their parents. Write 3-4 paragraphs answering the following:

- What do you think the aspects are of a healthy relationship? What about an unhealthy relationship?
- Does Aristotle have a healthy relationship with his parents? What about Dante? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
- Compare and contrast the relationship between Aristotle and his parents and Dante and his parents.

RESEARCH TOPICS

Second-Generation Immigrants

Research:

- What does it mean to be a second-generation immigrant?
- How many second-generation immigrants are there in the United States? What countries do most of them originate from?
- What are some unique challenges and opportunities that second-generation immigrants face?

Refer back to the text:

- What similarities and differences do you see between the research you've done and the struggles that Aristotle and Dante face?
- Do you think that author did a good job at representing second generation immigrants? Why or why not?

See Supplemental Texts & Media – Second-Generation Immigrants.

PROJECTS

My Fullest Name

Everyone has a personal and social identity. Personal identities include an individual's name, unique characteristics, history, personality and other traits that make one different from others. Social identity includes affinities one has with other people, values and norms that one accepts, and the ways one has learned to behave in social settings.

Materials Needed: Markers and 8-by-10-inch sheets of paper.

Write out your fullest name and tell your story. Write your name on one side of the paper. On the back of the piece of paper write the top three identities you feel closest to. The facilitator encourages participants to go around the circle to share any meanings, significance, culture, significant ancestors and the top three identities they hold dearest. Everyone will have a chance to share and be heard by the group. Suggested questions to get started:

- Who gave you your name? Why that name?
- Do you know the ethnic origin of your name?
- Do you have any nicknames? If so, how did you get them?
- What is your preferred name?

msw.usc.edu/mswusc-blog/diversity-workshop-guide-to-discussing-identity-power-and-privilege/#name

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXTS & MEDIA

1. Student Resources:

Healthy Relationships

www.thetrevorproject.org/trvr_support_center/healthy-relationships/#sm.0001uwlvgw1n8dotsw12haas4y1ic

2. Article:

Second-Generation Immigrants

www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/02/07/second-generation-americans/

3. Toolkit:

Diversity Toolkit: A Guide to Discussing Identity, Power, and Privilege

msw.usc.edu/mswusc-blog/diversity-workshop-guide-to-discussing-identity-power-and-privilege/#name

SECTION 3 GUIDE

READING CHECK

Use these simple comprehension questions to check that your students have completed their reading assignment for this section and understand what they read:

1. Where does Aristotle wake up in the beginning? Why?
2. Why is Dante going to Chicago?
3. What did Dante leave for Ari when he went to visit? What did Ari do with it?
4. What does Ari want for his birthday?
5. What do Dante and Ari do when Dante comes to visit before leaving for Chicago?

Answer Key

1. In the hospital. He had pushed Dante out of the way of the car and had gotten hit.
2. His father has a new job there for a year.
3. His sketch pad. He threw it at the wall.
4. An old pickup truck.
5. They look at Dante's sketches together.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TEXT ANALYSIS

1. After waking up in the hospital, Aristotle talks with several people about the incident.
 - What is the overall tone of these interactions?
 - Why is Aristotle uncomfortable with the crying and attention?
 - How does Aristotle feel about what happened?
2. Read and analyze: *"I'm just a regular guy." 'Yeah, that's how you see yourself. But, you pushed your friend out of the way of an oncoming car. You did that, Ari, and you didn't think about yourself or what would happen to you. You did that because that's who you are.'* (Ch. 2, pg. 122)
 - What does this show about how Ari sees himself? About how others see him? Which is a more accurate portrayal of who Ari is? Why?
 - Do you think Dr. Charles sees who Ari truly is when Ari is not able to? Why or why not?
 - Why do you think Ari pushed Dante out of the way so quickly?
 - What characteristics define Aristotle? What does he value?
3. Aristotle's relationship with his dad starts to change during this section (Ch. 5, pg. 135).
 - How does their relationship change? Why does this change take place?
 - What are different events or topics of discussion that bring them closer? What similarities and differences do they find between themselves?
4. Read and analyze: *"Dante had this look on his face. He looked like an angel. And all I wanted to do was put my fist through his jaw. I couldn't stand my own cruelty."* (Ch. 8, pg. 144)
 - What has happened to Dante and Aristotle's relationship? What has caused it to change?
 - Why is Ari starting to have violent thoughts about Dante?
 - What instances have we seen so far in the book of Ari channeling his anger into violence? Why do you think he is quick to react with violence? What does this tell you about his character?

SECTION 3
ARISTOTLE & DANTE
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CHAPTERS/PAGES:
The End of Summer
Pages 111-154

FOCUS:

- Anger
- Evolving Relationships

5. Read and analyze: *“Swimming and you, Ari. Those are the things I love the most.” ‘You shouldn’t say that,’ I said. ‘It’s true.’ ‘I didn’t say it wasn’t true. I just said you shouldn’t say it.’”* (Ch. 9, pg. 151)

- Do you think this quote could be foreshadowing for something to come later in the novel? Why or why not?
- Why does Ari warn Dante not to talk that way? In what ways do Ari and Dante cope with their feelings differently?
- Are there situations when one should not speak the truth? Why or why not?

6. Dante gives Ari his sketchbook and they go over it on his last day (Ch. 11, pgs. 152-154).

- What do the sketches mean to Dante? Why are they so important to him? How can you tell?
- What do the sketches mean to Ari? Why did he wait so long to look at them? What does it reveal about his character that he is looking at them now?

WRITING PROMPTS

Anger

Recall a time when you were angry and write one paragraph that answers the following:

- Why were you angry? What happened?
- How did you react? Did you show your anger or bottle it in? Why?
- How did your reaction affect you and the people around you? What consequences did your reaction have?

Write a second paragraph that answers the following:

- What did you learn from the situation?
- Would you react differently if this happened again? What would you do differently?

Write a third paragraph that answers the following:

- Look for one instance in the book in which Aristotle is angry. Why is he angry? How does he deal with his anger in this instance? How does his reaction impact those around him?

SECTION 4 GUIDE

READING CHECK

Use these simple comprehension questions to check that your students have completed their reading assignment for this section and understand what they read:

1. What happens when Ari tells Gina and Susie the truth about his injuries?
2. What happens after school on the second day of school?
3. What type of car does Ari get for his birthday?
4. Where does Ari want to drive to first?
5. Who does Ari decide to kiss?
6. Why does Ari spend his time in the library?
7. How does Ari get Legs?
8. What does Ari find in the spare bedroom?

Answer Key

1. They don't believe that he is a hero and think that he is lying.
2. Ileana writes on Ari's casts.
3. A 1957 red Chevy pickup truck.
4. The desert.
5. Ileana.
6. He is trying to find newspaper clippings about why his brother is in prison.
7. She follows him home when he goes on his walk.
8. An envelope with his brother's name on it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TEXT ANALYSIS

1. Read and analyze: *"Your sad sack moods are nobody's fault but yours."* (Ch. 1, pg. 158)
 - How would you describe Gina? What are her characteristics and what does she value?
 - Would you consider her a good friend? Why or why not?
 - Is Gina correct? Are an individual's emotions something that they are responsible for? Why or why not?
 - Is it right to blame your mood on someone else? Why or why not? What is implied when an individual does so?
2. This section contained some extremely short chapters - some were as short as a paragraph.
 - Why would the author choose to have such short chapters?
 - Do these chapters and their length add or take away anything from the story?
 - Does this reveal anything about Aristotle's character or his relationship with Dante? How can you tell?
3. Read and analyze: *"Every day I got up early and hobbled over to my truck...there was a whole universe waiting to be discovered in a pickup truck."* (Ch. 7, pg. 168)
 - What does this truck represent for Aristotle? Why is it so important to him?
 - Does Aristotle need a pickup truck in order to discover the universe? Why or why not?
 - What does it mean to discover the whole universe? How does one go about doing so?
 - Why do you think Aristotle wants to take his truck to the desert to look at the stars? Is this in or out of character for him? Explain your answer.

SECTION 4
ARISTOTLE & DANTE
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CHAPTERS/PAGES:

Letters on a Page
Pages 157-232

FOCUS:

- Internal Conflict
- Dreams

4. Read and analyze: *“I didn’t tell her that I hadn’t been paying attention. I’d been looking at a girl when I should have been driving. And that’s why I ran over Dante.”* (Ch. 7, pg. 171)

- What does this dream reveal about Aristotle’s thoughts at this time?
- What is the conflict Aristotle is currently having?
- Aristotle often thinks of Dante right after he thinks of Ileana, or vice versa. Why do you think this is? Explain your answer.

5. Read and analyze: *“I sometimes think that I don’t let myself know what I’m really thinking about. That doesn’t make much sense but it make sense to me.”* (Ch. 9, pg. 178)

- Do you think Aristotle is making a fair and accurate assessment of himself with this statement? Why or why not?
- Find an example of a time when Ari might have been “hiding” his true thoughts from himself. Cite evidence from the text.

6. Read and analyze: *“I have this idea that the reason we have dreams is that we’re thinking about things we don’t know we’re thinking about - and those things, well, they sneak out of us in our dreams. Maybe we’re like tires with too much air in them. The air has to leak out. That’s what dreams are.”* (Ch. 9, pg. 178)

- Do you agree with Ari’s idea? Why or why not?
- What are some of the recurring themes of Ari’s dreams? Why do you think he dreams about similar things and people over and over again?
- Ari wonders: *“...what does it mean that I ran over Dante in my dream?...Both times I was staring at Ileana when I ran over Dante.”* (Ch. 11, pg. 180) If Ari’s idea about dreams is correct, what is the reason he’s having this dream? What does this dream reveal about Ari?

See Writing Prompts – Dreams and Projects – Dream Journal for additional activities.

7. Aristotle and Dante keep in touch through letters while Dante is in Chicago.

- How does this distance impact their friendship? Do you think the distance will be good or bad for them in the long run?
- Is distance ever good for a relationship? Explain your answer.
- Dante thinks about why Ari hasn’t written him back and says: *“If I want to write you, then I’ll write to you. And if you don’t want to write to me, you don’t have to. You have to be who you are. And I have to be who I am.”* (Ch. 13, pg. 184) What does this thought process reveal about Dante’s character? Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

8. Read and analyze: *“The Ari I used to be didn’t exist anymore. And the Ari I was becoming? He didn’t exist yet.”* (Ch. 16, pg. 189)

- If the old Ari doesn’t exist anymore and the new Ari isn’t here yet, then who is Ari now? What is there left?
- What causes Ari to feel like he is evolving? What characteristics might Ari be leaving behind when he refers to “the Ari I used to be”? What about him has changed?

9. Read and analyze: *“‘What do you want, Ari?’ And then I answered myself, ‘A life.’ ‘What’s a life, Ari?’ ‘Like I know the answer to that?’ ‘Deep down inside you know.’”* (Ch. 22, pg. 208)

- What does Ari mean when he says he wants a life?
- How does one define a life? How do you know when you have it?
- Ari is having this conversation with himself. What does that show about Ari’s thoughts in this moment?

10. Dante comes to a realization about his sexuality. *“...I keep wondering what they’re going to say when I tell them that someday I want to marry a boy.”* (Ch. 30, pg. 227)

- Did this surprise you? Why or why not?
- What hints or suggestions were provided about Dante’s sexuality up until this point? Does anything take on new meaning if you think back on it now?
- How do you think this will impact Aristotle and Dante’s relationship going forward?

WRITING PROMPTS

Dreams

Dreams play an important role in this section and throughout the novel. Aristotle struggles with his dreams. His father has dreams of the war. Even Dante has dreams when he is sick. Choose a dream that Aristotle has and theorize on the deeper meaning behind it. Using examples from the text, write about the dream itself and explore how it connects to Aristotle's life and the things that he is struggling with at the moment.

Discovering the Universe

The idea of "discovering the secrets of the universe" is prominent throughout this novel. Write 2-3 paragraphs answering the following questions:

- What is Aristotle trying to discover? What about Dante? Cite evidence from the text to explain your answer.
- What do you think the "secrets of the universe" are?

PROJECTS

Dream Journal

Materials Needed: paper (or notebook), writing utensil

Aristotle's dreams are prominent throughout the novel and are often highly symbolic of his thoughts and feelings.

For one week, keep a journal documenting your dreams. As soon as you wake up, jot down notes about anything you can remember from your dreams. Then under your notes, write a short analysis about what this dream could symbolize. For example if you dreamed you were late to class, maybe this is because you are stressed about school or another aspect of your life.

At the end of one week, write one paragraph summarizing what you think your dreams say about you: Is there a common emotion or tone running throughout your dreams? Do you have recurring dreams? Are there familiar characters in your dreams? Etc.

SECTION 5 GUIDE

READING CHECK

Use these simple comprehension questions to check that your students have completed their reading assignment for this section and understand what they read:

1. What does Ari let Sam do when he shows them the truck?
2. What is Dante conflicted about sharing with his parents? Why?
3. Why do Ari and Dante kiss?
4. Who did Ari's mom leave to visit?
5. How did Gina and Susie find out that Ari was telling the truth?
6. Why do Ari and his dad need to go to Tuscon suddenly?
7. Why was Ari sent to Aunt Ophelia for nine months when he was young?
8. Why did Ari's extended family not approve of Aunt Ophelia?

Answer Key

1. He lets him take it for a spin with Dante's mom.
2. He is afraid to tell them that he is gay. He thinks that he will disappoint them.
3. Dante wanted Ari to see if he really did or did not like guys.
4. Aunt Ophelia.
5. They met Dante at the drugstore where he works and asked him about it.
6. Aunt Ophelia had a stroke and wasn't going to make it.
7. This was the time of Bernardo's trial and his mother had a breakdown.
8. She had a female life partner.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TEXT ANALYSIS

1. Read and analyze: *"It's the terrain where two different ecosystems meet. In an ecotone, the landscape will contain elements of the two different ecosystems. It's like a natural borderlands."* (Ch. 1, pg. 238)

- How does Ari's life resemble an ecotone?
- Are there other characters in the story who resemble ecotones? In what ways?

See *Writing Prompts – Ecotone and Research Topics – Ecotone in Real Life*.

2. Read and analyze: *"I wanted them to hug me just because I was Ari and I would never be just Ari to them."* (Ch. 2, pg. 242)

- What does Ari mean saying that he will never be "just Ari" to Dante's parents? Why does he want to be "just Ari"?
- Why does Ari feel guilty about the affection shown to him by Dante's parents? Is he justified in feeling this way? Why or why not?
- Ari differentiates between "the guy who had saved their son's life" and "just Ari". Are these different people or the same? Explain your answer.

SECTION 5 ARISTOTLE & DANTE DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE

CHAPTERS/PAGES:

Remember the Rain
Pages 235-294

FOCUS:

- Ecotone
- Love & Loyalty

3. Read and analyze: *"Someday, someone will walk up to you and say: 'Why are you hanging out with that queer?' If you can't stick by me as a friend, Ari, if you can't do that, then maybe it's better that you just, you know - it would kill me."* (Ch. 3, pg. 248)

- What does this reveal about Dante and his biggest concern?
- Does Ari seem like the type of person who would be loyal? Why or why not? How can you tell?
- Why would it be difficult for someone to be loyal in a situation like this?

4. Read and analyze: *"Another secret of the universe: sometimes pain was like a storm that came out of nowhere. The clearest summer morning could end in a downpour. Could end in lightning and thunder."* (Ch. 6, pg. 261)

- Ari has spent the story trying to uncover the secrets of the universe. Now he is starting to discover them. When did this transition happen? How did it happen?
- Why is Ari feeling this great pain?
- Ari says that the storm, the pain, came out of nowhere. Did it really? Was this a sudden thing for Ari or has it slowly been building up? How can you tell?

5. Ari continues to learn more about his parents and the reason behind their actions, especially in regards to Bernardo. He's heard about his mother's breakdown and seen his father cry (Ch. 12, pg. 283).

- Why is Ari seeing this new side to his parents?
- Ari is beginning to see his parents as human. How does this change how he interacts with his parents?
- Do you think his parents were wrong to keep the details from him for so long? Why or why not?
- Who do you think was more impacted by the silence surrounding Bernardo: Ari or his parents? Explain your answer.

6. After Aunt Ophelia dies, Ari learns that Aunt Ophelia had a female life partner and was disowned by the rest of the family (Ch. 14, pg. 286).

- How does this new discovery change Ari's perspective on his family? On his parents? On himself?
- How does Aunt Ophelia's story impact Ari? Why do you think it impacts him in this way?
- Ari ends by saying that he is crying because he is happy. Is he only happy about getting to learn about Bernardo? What else could he be happy about?

WRITING PROMPTS

1. Ecotone

An ecotone is a place where two ecosystems meet. Ari can relate to ecotones in several ways - what are two ways in which Ari's life resembles an ecotone? Is Ari the only character whose life is an ecotone? Pick one other character whose life could be an ecotone and defend your choice. In addition to writing about Aristotle and one other character, write one paragraph about yourself and how you relate to the definition of an ecotone.

2. Rain

Throughout the novel, it often rains at important moments. For example, when Ari pushes Dante out of the way of the car or when Ari and his parents are driving back from Tuscon. Write 2-3 paragraphs answering the following:

- What does rain symbolize in this novel? Cite evidence from the text.
- What does Ari mean when he says, "Boys like me belonged to the rain." (Ch. 18, pg. 294)
- Why do you think this section is called "Remember the Rain"?

See Projects – Symbolism.

RESEARCH TOPICS

Ecotone in Real Life

Research:

- What is an ecosystem? What are different types of ecosystems. Name at least five and give a brief description of each.
- Find an example of an ecotone that exists somewhere on Earth. What are the characteristics of this ecotone? What are the two different ecosystems that make up this specific ecotone? How do they react?

Discuss:

- Were you aware of ecotones before reading this novel? Are you surprised they exist? Why or why not?
- Based off your research, which two ecosystems do you think would make the most interesting ecotone? Explain your answer.

Refer back to the text:

- Do you think an ecotone is an appropriate metaphor for Ari's life? Why or why not?
- Why do you think the author chose to include this in the book?

PROJECTS

Symbolism

Materials Needed: large posters, writing utensils

Break into groups (2-4 students to each group depending on the size of the classroom). Each group gets one poster and is assigned one of the following recurring symbols from the novel: rain, birds, dreams, the universe, the desert, or tennis shoes.

Write your assigned symbol on the top of your poster. Then, in two minutes, as a group write down as many themes you can think of that your assigned topic symbolizes. Think beyond the novel. For example, a group assigned "rain" might write down: sadness, depression, a new beginning, growth, etc.

After the two minutes, come back together as a whole group and discuss the themes you wrote down. Which most accurately represent this novel? As a class, see if you can decide on five main themes for *Aristotle & Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*.

SECTION 6 GUIDE

READING CHECK

Use these simple comprehension questions to check that your students have completed their reading assignment for this section and understand what they read:

1. Why was Dante in the hospital?
2. Why was Ari mad at Daniel?
3. What was Ari's reaction after finding out that Julian had jumped Dante?
4. Why was Bernardo arrested?
5. Where did Ari's dad fight? Who did he lose?

Answer Key

1. He got beat up after a group of guys saw him kissing his boyfriend.
2. Daniel ran away while Dante was getting beat up.
3. He went to his work, got into a fight, and broke his nose.
4. He beat a transgender prostitute to death.
5. Vietnam; Louie.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TEXT ANALYSIS

1. Read and analyze: *"Dante's my friend.' I wanted to tell them that I'd never had a friend...Until Dante. I wanted to tell them that I never knew that people like Dante existed in the world, people who looked at the stars, and knew the mysteries of water, and knew enough to know that birds belonged to the heavens..."* (Ch. 3, pg. 308-309)
 - How does Aristotle feel about Dante? Explain your answer.
 - In Aristotle's eyes, what type of person is Dante? What words do you think Aristotle would use to describe Dante?
 - Dante's mother wants to know why he didn't run from the beating and Ari answers is: *"Because he's Dante."* (pg. 309). What does he mean by that? How can you tell?
2. Aristotle continually struggles with the idea of growing up and becoming a man (Ch. 4, pg. 310).
 - What does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be a boy? Are these universal definitions or can they vary from person to person? How?
 - Is Ari a boy or a man? Is Dante a boy or a man? Is Sam a boy or a man? Explain why for each of them.
3. Read and analyze: *"You're fighting this war in the worst possible way.' I don't know how to fight it, Dad.' 'You should ask for help.' 'I don't know how to do that, either.'"* (Ch. 6, pg. 319)
 - What war is Ari's father referring to? How is Ari fighting it?
 - Why doesn't Ari know how to ask for help? How can he learn how to ask for help?
 - Is asking for help a strength or a weakness? Why?
 - Compare this to the beginning of the novel when Aristotle says, *"I wasn't very good at asking for help, a bad habit I inherited from my father."* (Ch. 4, pg. 15) How has Aristotle grown since the beginning of the novel? How has his relationship with his father grown? Explain your answer.
4. Read and analyze: *"To be careful with people and with words was a rare and beautiful thing."* (Ch. 9, pg. 324)

SECTION 6
ARISTOTLE & DANTE
DISCOVER THE
SECRETS OF THE
UNIVERSE

CHAPTERS/PAGES:

All the Secrets of the
Universe
Pages 297-359

FOCUS:

- Character
Development

- How does Ari’s view of his parents change as they tell him more about Bernardo?
- Are words important? Are they powerful? Why or why not?
- Why does Ari see this aspect of his father as a “rare and beautiful thing”?

5. Read and analyze: *“Maybe we lived between hurting and healing. Like my father, I think that’s where he lived. In that in-between space. In that ecotone.”* (Ch. 14, pg. 335)

- Define the ecotone, the in between space, that Ari lives in, if any.
- Define the ecotone that Dante lives in, if any.
- What are the pros and cons to living in an “in between space”?

6. Read and analyze: *“Ari, the problem isn’t just that Dante’s in love with you. The real problem - for you, anyway - is that you’re in love with him.”* (Ch. 18, pg. 348)

- Why is Ari reluctant to admit that he is in love with Dante?
- How long has Ari been struggling with these feelings? How can you tell? Cite evidence from the text.
- How does this admission change the way you view Ari’s character? Should it change the way we view Ari’s character? Why or why not?
- How does this change the way you perceive Ari’s struggle throughout the story? What was he struggling with all this time he’s been trying to uncover the secrets of the universe?
- What specific events in the novel led Ari to this realization and allowed him to admit his feeling for Dante?

See Writing Prompt – Feelings Foreshadowed.

WRITING PROMPTS

1. Feelings Foreshadowed

In the end, Ari comes to terms with his feelings for Dante. Looking back at the story, how has this ending and Ari’s feelings for Dante been foreshadowed? Find two examples and write a paragraph for each analyzing how that scene or moment foreshadowed or revealed Ari’s true feelings for Dante.

Write a third paragraph analyzing Ari’s internal conflict throughout this story. What did he think he was struggling with? What was he actually struggling with?

2. Ending

Read and analyze the last lines of the novel: *“I took Dante’s hand and held it. How could I have ever been ashamed of loving Dante Quintana?”* (Ch. 21, pg. 359)

Write 3-5 paragraphs answering the following questions:

- Did you find this ending powerful? Why or why not?
- Why did Aristotle feel ashamed of loving Dante? Think about both personal and societal factors.
- Why did you think the author chose this as the last line?
- Imagine Aristotle’s future. What does it look like?

WORDS ALIVE VOLUNTEER FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

WARM UPS

Round Robin Question: If you had the car of your dreams, where is the first place you would go? Why?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did you feel about the book overall? What was the experience of reading it like?
2. Who was your favorite character and why?
3. What do you think the author was trying to accomplish with this novel?
4. Are any events in the book relevant to your own life? Overall, did you find the story realistic? Do you think the author wanted it to feel realistic? Why or why not?
5. This story is told from Aristotle's perspective.
 - Why do you think the author focused only on Ari's perspective?
 - What type of bias does Ari's perspective introduce to the story?
 - How would the story be different if it was told from another character's perspective?
 - Is there another character whose perspective you would have liked to hear? Whose? Why?
6. Aristotle and Dante struggle with their Mexican-American identities.
 - How is this struggle similar and/or different for Dante and Aristotle?
 - Who do you think has the biggest conflict about their Mexican-American identity? Why?
 - How does this relate to the idea of an ecotone?
 - What are your experiences living in an environment with mixed cultures, if any? What are the difficulties and challenges you have faced in this setting? What are the benefits of this environment?
7. Throughout the story, Dante and Aristotle reference the secrets of the universe.
 - What are the secrets of the universe that the boys are searching for?
 - Can the secrets of the universe be discovered? Should they be discovered? Why or why not?
 - What is one secret of the universe that you would like revealed? Why?
8. Art plays an important role in this story. Dante gives Ari his sketchbook and they go over it on his last day. Ari's dad finds happiness in the art book that Dante gives him.
 - What does art mean to Dante? Why is it so important to him?
 - What does art mean to Ari? To his father? Why?
 - Why do you think art plays such an important role in this story?
 - Is art an important part of life? Why or why not?

FACILITATION BEST PRACTICES

Create a safe space to share opinions.

Don't fear silences. Give students time to think.

Validate students' responses with reflective listening.

Ask follow-up questions.

Keep the session engaging & fun.

STUDENT FACILITATORS

Let the students take the lead!

Give students time to write down questions they wonder about the book. Then, give each student an allotted amount of time to ask their question(s) and facilitate the feedback from their peers.

WRITING PROMPTS

1. Diary and Sketches

Aristotle starts to write in a diary. Dante is always sketching and painting pictures. Combine the two and write a diary sketchbook for one of the characters. Write three entries for this character. Each entry should contain a short written portion from that character's perspective and a small sketch related to that moment.

2. Secrets of the Universe

What are the secrets of the universe? Write a list of ten secrets that the world needs to know. For each secret, write a few sentences answering the question: why is each an important secret?

3. Perspective

This story is told entirely from Aristotle's perspective. What would it be like from Dante's perspective? Pick two scenes in this story to rewrite in Dante's perspective. Write a third scene from the time that Dante was away.

PROJECTS

Secrets of the Universe Book Cover

Part 1: As a group, analyze the cover for this book. What common themes from the book do you see represented in the book cover? Are any of these secrets of the universe that Aristotle and Dante discover present on the cover?

Part 2: Then, start designing a new book cover using the ten secrets of the universe you identified in the above writing prompt. Think about the overall message you want to convey with your book cover and write a short proposal about what you hope your book cover will convey.

Part 3: Once you have a proposal written, begin brainstorming concrete images for the cover and think about what you want the actual design to look like. Is there a certain color you want prominent on the cover? Do you want a figure to appear on the cover? Is that figure Aristotle? Someone else? How will you represent the mood from your proposal on the cover?

Part 4: Using paper, writing utensils, coloring utensils, and any other supplies you see fit, make your cover.

Part 5: Share your design with the class and have students analyze each other's covers. Ask questions like: Does this cover evoke a different mood from the current one? What does this cover say or tell you about the book that the current one does not? What does this cover tell you about the person who designed it? Does this cover catch your eye? What stands out to you?

FACILITATION BEST PRACTICES

Create a safe space to share opinions.

Don't fear silences. Give students time to think before they talk.

Validate students' responses with reflective listening.

Ask follow-up questions.

Keep the session engaging & fun.

WRITING WARM UP

Before students begin the prompt, get their minds moving!

Play a word game like Scattergories, brainstorm together, and show examples of before sending them off to do the assignment.