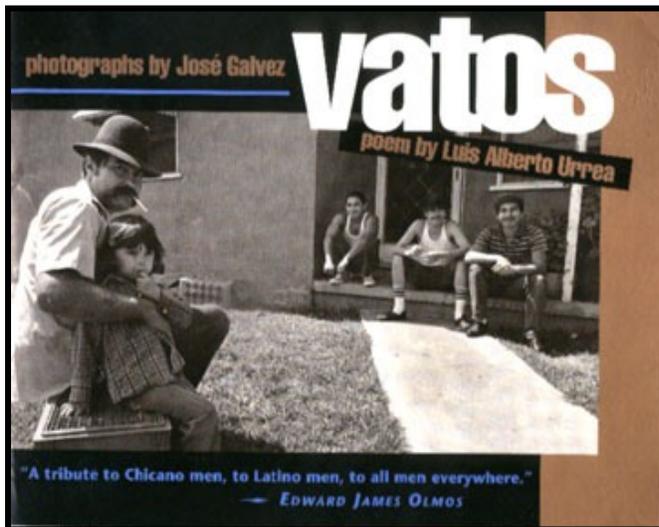


Teacher's Guide to

Vatos

Poem by Luis Alberto Urrea

Photographs by José Galvez



AWARDS

- YALSA Reluctant Young Adult Readers Quick Pick 2002
- TAYSHAS Texas High School Reading List 2002-2003

THEMES

- Pride in Heritage
- Hispanic studies
- Photo-Realism/Portrait Photography
- Poetry
- Chicano men/Latino men/All men
- Self-worth

CRITIC'S PRAISE

Dallas Morning News, 2000

Vatos is a collaboration between Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer José Galvez and Poet Luis Alberto Urrea. The poem celebrates vatos in every line, ending with the affirmation (and promise), "All you vatos, you are not forgotten." Mr. Galvez's 65 black-and-white photographs remind us that there is no single "Hispanic experience," that Hispanic culture is not monolithic. The rich diversity of these images of life in Los Angeles, Tucson and elsewhere combines with Mr. Urrea's deeply rhythmic litany in a way that is by turns haunting and inspiring.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Luis Alberto Urrea is the author of several books, among them *Across the Wire*. After doing relief-work on the border for six years, he taught Expository Writing at Harvard. His fiction, non-fiction, and poetry are widely anthologized—most recently in *The Late Great Mexican Border* and in *The Best American Poetry*. He has received the Christopher Award, the Colorado Center for the Book Award, the Western States Book Award for Poetry, the American Book Award among others.



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ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

For more than 30 years, José Galvez has been documenting his own culture, the Mexican-American community, through photographs. Galvez was the first Hispanic to receive a Pulitzer Prize. He won this prestigious award for his stunning portrayal of Hispanic life in Los Angeles. Galvez has worked as a staff photographer for the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Arizona Daily Star* and contributed photos to the book *Americanos*: produced by Edward James Olmos.

BOOK SUMMARY

This book provides a pictorial and lyrical experience about what is both average and extraordinary, namely the everyday faces of Latino men who are often overlooked and unfairly perceived by society. The vatos in this collection—street slang for “dude” or “guy” or “pal” or “brother”—are ordinary men primarily from Los Angeles, California and Tucson, Arizona. The black and white photos offer a poignant portrayal and cover a thirty year span from the late 1960’s to the year 2000. They serve as a visual interpretation for the text which is a poem titled, “Hymn to Vatos Who Will Never Be in a Poem.”

The poem provides a collective voice for those Latino men who have been erased or ignored. The words pay tribute to all the fathers, uncles, brothers and others who have typically remained unheard or unnoticed. The entire text consists of sixty-one lines. Every line, except the last one, starts with “All the vatos” and follows with a six beat homage to the modern Latino man. The chant-like rhythm makes for a different kind of reading experience whether one is reading silently or aloud, by oneself or as a choral group. The book instills the belief that ordinary people are extra-ordinary, and the last line personalizes the main message, “All you vatos, you are not forgotten.”

TEACHING OVERVIEW

The rhythmic quality of the poem and the visual richness of the photographs provide an opportunity to introduce young adult reluctant readers to reading as a multi-modal and multi-sensory experience. Since the text in *Vatos* is minimal and the pictures literally are worth more than a thousand words, the book serves as an excellent tool for reducing anxiety and increasing comfort levels for those students who struggle with reading. Numerous options exist for developing cognitive skills in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing. Key learning objectives include language awareness, cultural appreciation, higher level thinking skills, and communicative competence.

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LESSON PLAN ACCOUNTABILITY

This guide provides activities and discussion prompts designed to increase oral and written language skills, develop visual literacy, and foster reading as a way to make connections. Divided into Before, During and After “Reading/Viewing” sections, this guide is organized so the teacher can choose to work with the text and photos together or in isolation. The teacher will also find specific activities for the remaining parts of the book which include: the Photo Captions, foreword, and background information on the photographer and writer.

For teacher convenience and assessment purposes, generalized Language Arts content standards have been incorporated into the formulation of the following questions and activities. The guide also contains a section with two appendixes. See Appendix A for furthering oral language development. Appendix B offers specific strategies on how to utilize journals, journal writing, and feedback for a variety of purposes in the classroom.

BEFORE READING/VIEWING

Write the word “vatos” on the board and elicit responses from your students as to its meaning. To help expand upon their responses, ask them to tell you what word or words they use for “brother” in their personal interactions. Discuss the definition by Luis Urrea in the foreword on pg. 5. Have students brainstorm and list what they think assimilated “good Mexicans” like and don’t like to call themselves.

Ask students to study the front and back cover of the book along with the captions, title and photograph. Have them make predictions about the content and message of the book based on their observations. Regarding the front cover photograph, have them guess what year it was taken and share what clues they used to base their response. Who do they think the house belongs to and why? What relationship do they think exists between any or all of the people in the photo? Have students explain their response and describe what visual evidence they used. Compare their answers to the photo caption titled “Boyle Heights” on pg. 90. Inform students they will be expected to visually interpret and process any or all of the book’s photographs in much the same way.

Read the entire foreword by Benjamin Alire Sáenz as a group. Ask students to describe what they think Sáenz means when he says, “Our eyes are little more than weapons.” What image do they see in their minds?

According to Sáenz, the photographs and words of the poem have altered how he used to view the vatos of his past and would have viewed the vatos represented in these photos. How does Sáenz now view vatos in retrospect?



He claims the book is a “miraculous intervention” (i.e. he cannot turn away from “these kind of people” now). Have students interpret what they believe Sáenz means by “miraculous intervention.” Define “miraculous intervention” as a group (i.e. examine /research the meanings of the words “miraculous” and “intervention” separately and then as a coined term). Ask students if they think they will experience something similar or feel the same way? Have students explain their responses and explore any held assumptions.

Read the background information about José Galvez and Luis Alberto Urrea, the photographer and writer respectively (see pg. 94-95). Ask students if they were assigned to portray an aspect of their own lives using only photography or poetry which would they choose? Why? If they could spend an afternoon with the photographer or writer, who would they prefer to meet? Ask students to elaborate upon their preference.

AS READING/VIEWING PROGRESSES

This section is divided into three segments: *Text of poem only*; *Photos Only (in conjunction with “Photo Captions” section)*; and *Text and Photos combined*. The teacher can choose any or all these approaches according to their specific teaching schedules and situations.

SEGMENT ONE: Text of poem only

Read together aloud the entire poem (see pg. 6-7). Ask students what they noticed about the poem after the group reading? Talk about the use of word repetition, syllables per line, rhythm characteristics, etc. Ask how the experience felt to read aloud as a group? What are the advantages and disadvantages to reading aloud as a large group?

For variety, divide the class in half and reread the poem where one half reads “All the vatos” and the other half responds with the rest of the line. Repeat the exercise and have students work in pairs.

As an extension or follow up activity, use the choral reading exercise arranged by Marisa Esposito (see Appendix A).

For vocabulary development, have students create a special glossary of the street slang and/or cultural terms that surface in the poem (i.e. menudo, Wino Jefe Peewee, cabrones, ranfla, mota, maricones, tatuajes, etc.). Have them alphabetize their list, research the terms using a variety of resources, and incorporate several different meanings or synonyms into their definitions. Discuss the content of the poem line by line either as a large group or divide class into small groups. Encourage retelling and paraphrasing of the second clause. For added language development and enrichment, have students create their own “hymn to vatos” using the same structure and rhythm.



Set a minimum expectation of at least 10 original finish statements to the first clause, “All the vatos.” Model with some of your own or these examples:

1. All the vatos crowded into *coches* (coches: cars or automobiles)
2. All the vatos fishing in their *pangas* (pangas: fishing boat, row boat)
3. All the vatos eating enchiladas
4. All the vatos drinking with their buddies

SEGMENT TWO: Photos Only (in conjunction with “Photo Captions” section pg. 90-93)

The following questions and activities offer suggestions in working with the photos to develop visual literacy and interpretive skills. Several specific photographs will model what can be done with any or all of the remaining photos. Three organizational strategies for using the photos include: *Random selection or In isolation*; *By their story sequence (i.e. order of appearance)*; and/or *By the dates they were taken*.

Photos by Random selection or In isolation

Have students study the photo on pg. 17, “Tattoos 1985.” Ask these kinds of questions or create your own using these as sample constructs:

1. What do you see? (i.e. elicit details, encourage use of background clues for potential meaning)
2. Why do you think the photo is titled, “Tattoos?”
3. Where do you think the photo was taken? Why? What clues did you use? Does anything in the photo suggest something specific to 1985? If so, what?
4. Do you like tattoos? Why or why not? What do you know about tattoos (i.e. the process, the risks, the longevity, the meaning behind the statement or symbol...)?
5. Visit the photo captions comment on pg. 90. Do you agree that these vatos are trying to show off their bodies and tattoos? If so, why do you think this and why do you think they want to do this? If not, why else would these two men stand in public, revealing their tattoos?
6. Who do you think these men are? What do you think they are thinking? Explain your response.
7. Can you find at least one other photo in the book that deals with the same concept? Direct students to pg. 43, “Illustrated Man 1987.” What do you believe he is trying to communicate?

Photos by their story sequence (i.e. order of appearance)

Start at the very beginning with the title page photo and proceed through the book page by page with ample pauses for reflection, observation and interpretation of each photo’s meaning, composition, and impact on the viewer (i.e. see questions #1, #2, and #3



above). Have students look for connections or create transitions between the preceding photo and successive one.

Have students relate to their own experiences as they view each photo (i.e. see question #4 above). Ask questions that require using inference skills and drawing conclusions (i.e. see questions #2 and #6 above).

Utilize the photo caption's section to formulate questions for each photo, to verify photo content, and to note features specific to the photo's date and place (i.e. see question #5 above).

Follow up group discussions with journal writing time. Have students reflect upon what they have learned about themselves as a result of the photo visual analysis and interpretation process (see Appendix B for journal writing ideas and applications).

Ask for volunteers to read and share their entries. Create some ground rules for respect and trust: no personal put downs, venting about a specific person, or hurtful comments. As listeners, set the expectation that can provide positive feedback or remain quiet. Specifically, listeners are not to make fun of what they hear or make the reader feel uncomfortable.

Photos by the dates they were taken

As a group or individually, organize the viewing of any or all of the 64 photos by the years the photos were taken. Ask students to chunk or categorize the photos chronologically into specified time periods. For ideas, suggest the following: time by decades, by five year increments, smaller or larger increments, and/or by same year (i.e. the 1980's, mid-to late 1990's, any fifteen year span and/or any three year span, all photos in 1999, etc.).

Ask students to describe why they chose their specific time frame for organizing and viewing the photographs. Do they believe their choice adds or detracts from the overall viewing experience? Have students explain their response.

Have students select a series of photos from one of their "chunks" in time and make a presentation to the class. Ask them to consider and cover these kinds of questions:

1. Do any commonalities exist between the photos for the selected dates? If so, what are they?
2. Are there any visual clues that indicate features specific to the time period or date (i.e. style of dress, type of cars, background setting, etc.)?
3. What was going on historically during that time period (i.e. who was president, what were the issues of the time, what music was popular, etc.)?
4. Did any new observations surface as a result of examining the photos in this time-oriented fashion? Explain your response.



SEGMENT THREE: Text and Photos combined

The specific line and its concomitant photo on pg. 40-41 will model what can be done with any or all of the remaining lines in conjunction with their photos. The following procedure involves using these seven steps:

1. **Read the text aloud:** “All the vatos who were once our fathers” and “All the vatos even veteranos.”
2. **Analyze the photo and its title:** “Viejos 1986.”
3. **Write key vocabulary on the board:** “fathers,” “veteranos,” and “viejos.”
4. **Brainstorm/list what students know or what comes to mind regarding the key words:** Ask students what they think is meant by “fathers” in this context. Have students discuss what they know about “veteranos.” Ask what image comes to mind when they hear the term “viejos.”
5. **Discuss how the text supports the photo and how the photo supports the text:** Ask students what is gained and/or lost by presenting the text and photo together. Have them consider what they experience or feel when hearing only the text or seeing only the photo.
6. **Students draw their own illustration in conjunction with the text and/or photo title:** Ask students to formulate an image of “veteranos” or “viejos” in their mind and to draw a detailed picture of what they have visualized.
7. **Students write/create their own text to match the photo:** Ask students to study the photograph “Viejos 1986.” Have students write their own line of text that follows the same rhythm and pattern as a substitute for the book’s text. Ask students to share their versions aloud. As an extension, collect their versions and compile them into class handout for furthering their literacy skills and reading practice.

AFTER READING/VIEWING

Have students reconsider the advantages of using poetry and photography together for creating a message? In general, what is gained by using both together? Does anything get lost? Have students evaluate the benefits and limitations of using only photography as a medium for expression? How is the experience of poetry changed when there are no illustrations, pictures or photographs?

Revisit the statement by Sáenz that this book is a “miraculous intervention.” Ask students if they agree or disagree now? Did their response change? Why or why not. Have students describe “miraculous intervention” in their own words. As an alternative, use the words as a writing prompt for a short essay, commentary or as a title for a creative poem.



Have students make a personal time-line spanning the years of the photos using the years 1969 and 2000 as endpoints. Ask them to search their memories for significant or major moments that have somehow shaped who they are now. Encourage them to include meaningful events from their own lives, their family lives, and life in general in terms of external incidents or occurrences. To help students begin, model for them what you want them to do. Create your own sample time-line of your life during these dates. Begin by brainstorming and listing particular milestones or pivotal points in your life. Include topics like: births, deaths, competitions, accidents, accomplishments, travels, moves, natural disasters, health issues, political influences, etc. Have them watch you select and choose at least ten things from your list. Make the time-line and talk about your decisions and particular placement of your information.

Share your time-line as a short oral presentation and as a way to establish a personal connection with your students. Model what you expect from them as you do your delivery. Ask them to do short oral presentations and share their time-lines in front of the class.

Invite photographers and/or poets in your community to come and talk about their work with your students. Prepare your students with pertinent background information and ask them to write up a list of their own questions beforehand. Follow up with thank you letters. Do a mini-lesson on letter writing if necessary.

Seek out opportunities in your school and/or community to further develop the skills of your students who have or show an interest in photography and/or poetry. Provide situations in your classroom for students to bring in samples of their work for feedback, encouragement and/or appreciation.

APPENDIX A

Vatos, Poem by Luis Alberto Urrea, Cinco Puntos Press, copyright 2002

Rearranged for choral reading by Marisa Esposito

12 Readers: (meter, “one- two-three-four -FIVE six”)

<u>Readers</u>	<u>Line</u>	<u>Readers</u>	<u>Line</u>
1-6	All the vatos	1	Sleeping in the hillsides
7-12	All the vatos	2	Say goodnight forever
1-6	All the vatos	3	Loving their menudo
7-12	All the vatos	4	Faith in la tortilla
1-6	All the vatos	5	Fearing the alarm clock
7-12	All the vatos	6	Wino, Jefe (hefay), Peewee
1-6	All the vatos	7	Even the cabrones (<i>ca-brone-ays</i>)
7-12	All the vatos	8	Down por vida homeboys
1-6	All the vatos	9	Using words like “ranfla”
7-12	All the vatos	10	Who woke up abandoned
1-6	All the vatos	11	Not afraid of daughters
7-12	All the vatos	12	Arms around their sisters
1-6	All the vatos	1	Talking to their women
7-12	All the vatos	2	Granting their forgiveness
1-6	All the vatos	3	Planning wicked paybacks
7-12	All the vatos	4	Sleeping under mota (<i>moat-a</i>)
1-6	All the vatos	5	With tequila visions
7-12	All the vatos	6	They call maricones (<i>mar-ee-cone-ays</i>)

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1-6	All the vatos	7	Bleeding in the alley
7-12	All the vatos	8	Chased by helicopters
1-6	All the vatos	9	Dissed by pinches (<i>peenches</i>) white boys
7-12	All the vatos	10	Bent to pick tomatoes
1-6	All the vatos	11	Smoked by Agent Orange
7-12	All the vatos	12	Brave in deadly classrooms
1-6	All the vatos	1,2	Pacing in the prisons
7-12	All the vatos	3,4	Pierced by needle lightning
1-6	All the vatos	5,6	Who were once our fathers
7-12	All the vatos	7,8	Even veteranos (vet-er <i>-ahn-owes</i>)
1-6	All the vatos	9,10	And their abuelitos (<i>a-bway-lee-toes</i>)
7-12	All the vatos	11,12	Proud of tatuajes (<i>ta-too-ah-hays</i>)
1-6	All the vatos	1,2	Carrying a lunch pail
7-12	All the vatos	3,4	Graduating law school
1-6	All the vatos	5,6	Grown up to be curas (<i>cur-as</i>)
7-12	All the vatos	7,8	Never been to misa (<i>mees-a</i>)
1-6	All the vatos	9,10	Jimmy, Spider, Tito
7-12	All the vatos	11,12	Lost their tongues in Spanish
1-6	All the vatos	1,2,3	Can't say shit in English
7-12	All the vatos	4,5,6	Looking at her photo
1-6	All the vatos	7,8,9	Making love till morning
7-12	All the vatos	10,11,12	Stroking their own hunger

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1-6	All the vatos	1,2,3	Faded clear as windows
7-12	All the vatos	4,5,6	Needing something better
1-6	All the vatos	7,8,9	Bold in strange horizons
7-12	All the vatos	10,11,12	Waiting for tomorrow
1-6	All the vatos	1	Sure that no one loves them
7-12	All the vatos	2	Sure that no one sees them
1-6	All the vatos	3	Sure that no one hears them
7-12	All the vatos	4	Never in a poem
1-6	All the vatos	5	Told they don't belong here
7-12	All the vatos	6	Beautiful young Aztecs
1-6	All the vatos	7	Sons of Guadalupe
7-12	All the vatos	8	Bad as la chingada (<i>cheen-gah-da</i>)
1-6	All the vatos	9	Call themselves Chicanos
7-12	All the vatos	10	Praying for their children
1-6	All the vatos	11	Even all you feos (<i>fay-ohs</i>)
7-12	All the vatos	12	Filled with life eternal
1-6	All the vatos	1,2,3,4	Sacred as the Sun God
7-12	All the vatos	5,6,7,8	Flaco, Pepe, Gordo (Flahco, Pe-pay, Gordo)
1-6	All the vatos	9,10,11,12	Rising from their mothers
(All)	All the vatos	(All)	You are not forgotten



APPENDIX B

Journals can serve many purposes. In particular, they can be personal and develop skills in self-expression, self-educating, and individual discovery; they can provide teacher insight into common grammatical errors; and/or they can be used as a means of communicating ideas and creating written and oral dialogue.

If the objective is personal, provide in class writing time and have students keep their own journals. The purpose is for students to experience the process of journal writing both as a discipline and as a tool for self-exploration and learning through writing.

For instructional purposes, journals can become a rich source for language modeling if collected regularly as a dialogue journal with the teacher. In this case, the teacher responds to content and notices grammatical errors but does not correct them in journal. Instead, the teacher notices the kinds of mistakes occurring, models correct usage in their written response to the student, and creates mini-lessons to address those mistakes individually or with the entire class.

The dialogue can also occur between students. Students write their own entries and exchange their journals with another student. Each student responds to the content of what is written and then returns the journal back to its owner. Opportunities for oral language development can occur if students choose to discuss or share their ideas and responses. Students accept that the teacher will collect the journals periodically (i.e. to prevent abusive situations, and to serve as mini-lesson material for the teacher in terms of content and common grammatical errors).

It is suggested and encouraged that the teacher model writing and write while the students are writing. Take the opportunity to demonstrate and talk about your own thinking and writing process. Be open to taking risks in your own writing and willing to share your entries as appropriate for establishing trust and building a sense of community in your classroom.