

Teacher Guide

Grades 7–8

# Buried Onions

Gary Soto

NOVEL UNITS<sup>®</sup>



NEW WAYS TO TEACH READING,  
WRITING, & CRITICAL THINKING



## **Novel Units® Single-Classroom User Agreement for Non-Reproducible Material**

With the purchase of electronic materials (such as ebooks and print-on-demand teaching activities) from a Novel Units, Inc. (Novel Units) Web site, or that of a Novel Units authorized dealer's Web site, the customer (the purchaser or person for whom this product was purchased) is granted a single-classroom user license, which entitles the customer to use these materials for a single classroom (or home) only.

**Sharing the digital files or reproduction of any part of this publication in any way or by any means for additional classrooms (or homes), an entire school, or a school system; by for-profit institutions and tutoring centers; or for commercial sale is strictly prohibited.**

**Reproduction of any part of this Teacher Guide is strictly prohibited.**

Use of the materials for anything other than classroom instruction is a violation of Novel Units intellectual property rights. Novel Units retains full intellectual property rights on all proprietary products, and these rights extend to electronic editions of print books or materials, excerpts of print books or materials, and individual teaching activities offered for sale in digital format.

To obtain more information, or, if you would like to use Novel Units products for additional purposes not outlined in the single-classroom license (described above), please contact [customercare@ecslearningsystems.com](mailto:customercare@ecslearningsystems.com).

---

# BURIED ONIONS

by  
Gary Soto

## Teacher Guide

Written by  
Sharan Farmer

### Note

The 2006 Harcourt paperback edition of the novel, © 1997, 1996 by Gary Soto, was used to prepare this guide. The page references may differ in other editions. Novel ISBN: 0-15-206265-3

**Please note:** This novel deals with sensitive, mature issues. Parts may contain profanity, sexual references, and/or descriptions of violence. Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

---

ISBN 978-1-60878-197-3

Copyright infringement is a violation of Federal Law.

© 2012 by Novel Units, Inc., Bulverde, Texas. All rights reserved. Reproduction of any part of this product is strictly prohibited. No part of this publication may be translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted or shared in any way or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without prior written permission from Novel Units, Inc. Reproduction of any part of this publication for multiple school terms, an entire school or for a school system, by for-profit institutions and tutoring centers, or for commercial sale is strictly prohibited.

Novel Units is a registered trademark of Novel Units, Inc.

Publisher Information  
For a complete catalog, contact—

Novel Units, Inc.  
P.O. Box 97  
Bulverde, TX 78163-0097

Web site: [novelunits.com](http://novelunits.com)

For more digital resources, visit:  
[ecslarningsystems.com](http://ecslarningsystems.com)

## Table of Contents

Summary .....	3
About the Author.....	3
Characters .....	4
Initiating Activities.....	5
Vocabulary Activities.....	6
Six Sections .....	7
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
Post-reading Discussion Questions .....	18
Post-reading Extension Activities .....	20
Assessment.....	21
Scoring Rubric.....	31

## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Brainstorming, research, compare/contrast, analyzing details, drawing conclusions, identifying attributes, decision making, advantages/disadvantages, creative thinking, research

### Comprehension

Predicting, cause/effect, sequencing, main idea, inferences, summarizing

### Writing

Journal, newspaper article, novel ending, essay, police report, letter, note, quiz, menu, list, play

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, debate, role-playing, Spanish language

### Vocabulary

Parts of speech, definitions, context clues, usage, dictionary skills, synonyms, analogies

### Literary Elements

Figurative language, theme, author's style, mood, tone, irony, hyperbole, allusion, juxtaposition, symbolism, characterization, foreshadowing, conflict, point of view, imagery, plot development, dialogue, setting, stereotypes

### Across the Curriculum

Math—budgeting; Art—menu design, stenciling, drawing, poster; Science—onions; Drama—reenactment of key scenes, vocabulary charades; Geography—maps; Library Skills—dictionary, research; Social Studies—gangs, gang attire, tattoos, choices, social injustice, drug abuse, Lemoore Naval Air Station

## Chapters 1–2

Eddie’s father, two uncles, cousin, and best friend have already died. In poverty-ridden southeast Fresno, California, crime is an everyday occurrence in the *barrio* where Eddie and his friends live. Eddie is trying desperately to break free of this cycle of despair, but he loses hope when his new boss’s truck is stolen while Eddie is running an errand. To make matters worse, Eddie’s *Tía Dolores* wants him to avenge her son Jesús’s death. Eddie must also avoid the influence of Jesús’s gangster friends, Angel and Lupe, who want revenge for Jesús’s death as well.

Vocabulary	
	vapors
	mortuary
	fissures
	snide
	caravan
	smirked
	lilacs
	palms
	landlocked
	communion
	alms

### Discussion Questions

1. Explain Eddie’s theory about the origin of Fresno’s sadness. (*Eddie thinks “a huge onion buried under the city” [p. 2] is the cause of the inhabitants’ sadness since onions’ vapors induce tears and the lives of the people in the barrio are so bleak and filled with despair.*)
2. Why does Eddie compare himself to a red ant hauling a white speck? (*Eddie, like the ant, wants to “run a straight line” [p. 4] and stay out of trouble. All Eddie wants is to be independent, earn his keep, and avoid the many dangers that surround him.*)
3. Describe the conditions of the barrio where Eddie lives. (*Eddie’s and the surrounding apartments are run down with sagging fences, old paint, and swampy corners. The inhabitants are poor, unemployed, school dropouts, young mothers, children, or gangsters. Violent gangs roam the area, and many residents live in constant fear of them. Drugs are sold openly.*)
4. Why do you think Angel wants to avenge Jesús’s death? (*Answers will vary, but students should note that although Angel and Jesús were best friends, Eddie describes Angel as a vicious, sneaky person who bullies others to get what he wants. Angel does not seem to feel any remorse for hurting others, such as the Hispanic *Tía Dolores* claims Angel hit with baseball bats. Some students may think that Angel simply wants a cause to commit a violent act.*)
5. How do you know that Eddie desires to be a peaceful person? Provide evidence from the novel. (*Eddie simply avoids all of the violent and dangerous situations that confront him. Eddie says that “For [him], there wasn’t much to do except eat and sleep, watch out for a few cops, and pace [himself] through life” [p. 3]. He refuses to hear of Angel or his aunt Dolores about seeking revenge for Jesús’s murder. He tries even harder to obtain work painting addresses on residents’ curbs.*)
6. What does Eddie think of the old man trying to move the air conditioner? Why? (*Eddie surmises that the man is or was a drinker from the broken veins in his face. He thinks the man’s mind must be “squares and holes...for someone that he did to himself a long time ago.” Even this morning” [p. 13]. Eddie also guesses that the man has “breathed in the onion of sadness all his life” [p. 14] and is now worn out.*)
7. Discuss the irony of Angel’s name. (*According to Eddie, “[Angel] was anything but an angel...he even stole the crucifix that hung from his neck” [p. 18]. He is a remorseless thief, a drug user, a bully, and a racist. Eddie considers him a bad person with no redeeming qualities.*)
8. Why is Eddie so happy about his job with Mr. Stiles? (*Eddie is excited to have a job lined up, meaning guaranteed money. He feels Mr. Stiles respects him, as Mr. Stiles remembers Eddie’s name and leaves Eddie by himself often during his work. Mr. Stiles even brings Eddie food and drinks and gives him frequent breaks—one during which he lends Eddie his pickup truck to take a load of materials to the dump. Eddie is happy to work hard if it means getting paid and maintaining a good reputation with Mr. Stiles. Eddie does not have to worry about the violence, and Mr. Stiles is nice to him and respects him.*)

9. Why does Eddie lie to Mr. Stiles about being in college? (*Eddie wants to impress Mr. Stiles with his ambition. Even though Eddie dropped out of City College, he wants Mr. Stiles “to know that [he] was going places, even if it was only to a gravel roof” [p. 24]. Eddie seems ashamed of his low status in life.*)
10. What is ironic about Mr. Stiles’s four-leaf clover key ring? (*Four-leaf clovers are supposed to bring good luck, and Eddie notices the key ring just after Mr. Stiles’s truck is stolen from his apartment building. Eddie feels like his entire life is “filled with bad luck, poverty, and violence. He is anything but lucky.”*)
11. Eddie compares himself and his friends to “trolleys going back and forth, back and forth, getting nowhere” (p. 2). How is this analogy appropriate to Eddie’s life thus far? (*Eddie’s life goes quickly from emotional highs to emotional lows. For example, Eddie is initially depressed about his life and the neighborhood in which he lives. He soon becomes extremely happy after receiving work from Mr. Stiles. He is unhappy again after Mr. Stiles’s neighbor accuses him of cursing, and then he is content again as Mr. Stiles trusts him with his pickup truck. Eddie again reaches an emotional low after the truck is stolen.*)
12. Predict how will Tía Dolores deal with the pain of losing Jesús?

### Supplementary Activities

1. Geography: Using a map of California, locate the city of Fresno. Using a city map of Fresno, locate where Eddie and his friends live and where Eddie seeks work painting curb numbers.
2. Art: Sketch or paint a representation of the ironic Eddie imagines is buried beneath the city of Fresno.
3. Drama: In groups of three, practice role playing with the scene in which Eddie moves the air conditioner. Volunteers should present their reenactment to the class.

## Character Buzz Words

**Directions:** In the graphic below, write as many words as you can think of to describe Eddie. Your words may describe Eddie's appearance, personality, emotions, demographics, etc.

Character: Eddie

