



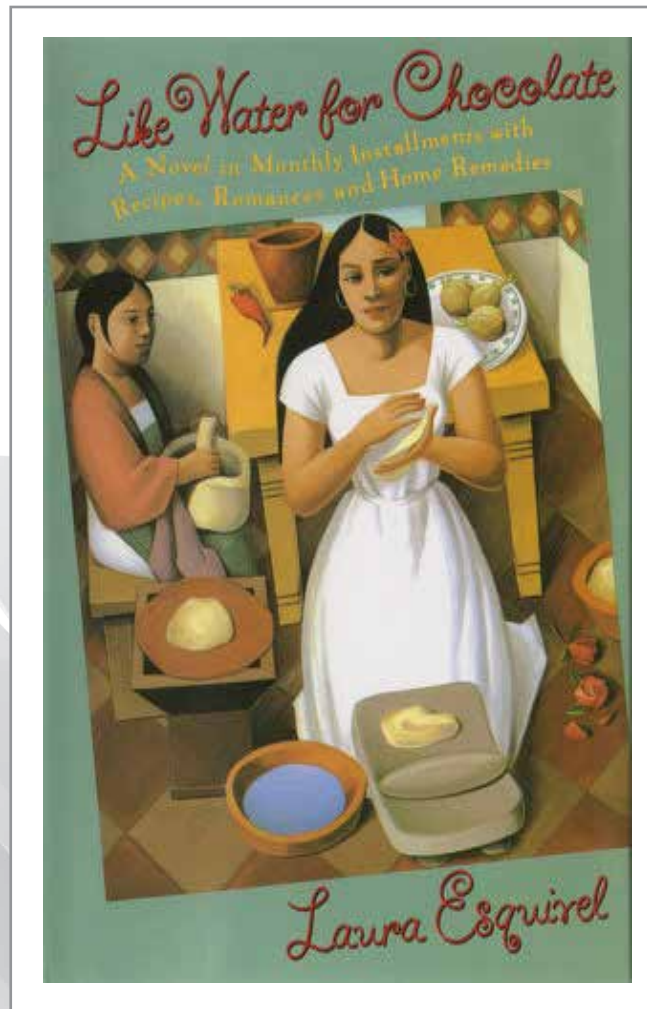
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Like Water for Chocolate

Laura Esquivel



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Like Water for Chocolate

Laura Esquivel

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

ISBN 978-1-50203-948-4

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Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Identifying attributes,
inferences, predictions,
cause/effect, plot development

Literary Elements

Story mapping, magical
realism, characterization,
setting, conflict, theme,
point of view, author's
purpose, figurative language

Vocabulary

Analogies, target words,
word maps, root words,
sorting

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation,
dramatization

Writing

Personal narrative, dialogue,
journalism, poetry, essay

Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, research,
compare/contrast, analysis,
evaluation

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—culture,
history, Mexican Revolution,
chocolate, etiquette, legends;
Health—nutrition, personal
hygiene and well-being;
Science—smell and memory,
leech therapy, bedbugs,
persistence of vision, lip-
reading; Music—appropriate
selections, composition,
ballad; Art—illustration,
design, collage, diorama

Genre: fiction; magical realism

Setting: northern Mexico; early 1900s during the Mexican Revolution

Point of View: first person (beginning and end narration), second person (recipes), and third-person omniscient (stories)

Themes: love, passion, identity, revolution, family, tradition, culture, gender roles, duty, victimization, destiny, the supernatural, feminism

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. society

Style: narrative (narrator recounts the life of Great-aunt Tita intermixing recipes and stories)

Tone: conversational, personal

Summary

Like Water for Chocolate is the story of Tita De la Garza, a girl living on a ranch near the U.S. border during the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Unlike her older sisters Gertrudis and Rosaura, who were born quite normally, Tita is born in the kitchen in a flood of onion-induced tears and is raised by the cook. As the youngest daughter, Tita is expected traditionally to remain unmarried in order to care for her mother until her mother's death. However, Tita falls in love with a boy named Pedro Muzquiz. When his intention to marry Tita becomes clear, Tita's mother, Mama Elena, forbids it. Pedro reluctantly marries Rosaura in order to remain near Tita. A heartbroken Tita begins channeling her emotions into her cooking, often resulting in mouthwatering meals that have unusual effects on those who eat them. After battling her emotions internally and Mama Elena externally for years, Tita eventually has a mental breakdown. John Brown, an American doctor, comes to Tita's rescue and eventually falls in love with her. After years of being repressed by her mother and societal expectations, Tita gives in to her love and lust for Pedro. The heat from Tita and Pedro's passion causes sparks that set the ranch aflame, and the two lovers perish in the fire; however, Tita's cookbook, along with her story of love, survives to be retold by future generations.

About the Author

Laura Esquivel was born in Mexico City, Mexico on September 30, 1950. She lived with her parents and three siblings across the street from her grandmother, who taught her how to cook and about medicinal and religious arts—topics that appear in her writing. Esquivel graduated from Escuela Normal de Maestros, Mexico's national teaching college, and became a kindergarten teacher and supervisor of a children's theater workshop. She began writing children's plays, and later, films for children's television. Her screenplay, *Chido One*, was produced and directed by her first husband, Alfonso Arau, and was nominated by the Mexican Academy of Motion Pictures for an Ariel Award. Esquivel then wrote the screenplay for *Como agua para chocolate* (*Like Water for Chocolate*). Again produced and directed by Arau, the film won 11 Ariel Awards and, at the time, was the highest-grossing foreign film ever released in the United States. *Like Water for Chocolate* has been translated into 30 languages with millions of copies in print. It won the American Booksellers Association's ABBY award. Other novels by Esquivel include *The Law of Love*, *Swift as Desire*, and *Malinche*. Esquivel and her current husband, Dr. Javier Valdez, live in Mexico.

Background Information

“Like water for chocolate” (or “*como agua para chocolate*”): This is a Spanish phrase with several meanings. It describes the Mexican method of preparing hot chocolate where chunks of chocolate are melted in boiling water. The phrase is a metaphor for passion or sexual excitement. It can also mean “boiling mad,” denoting intense emotions verging on eruption. As the title of the novel, the phrase is a simile to Tita’s love for Pedro—intense and always on the verge of erupting.

Structure of the novel: The novel’s structure follows its subtitle, “A Novel in Monthly Installments with Recipes, Romances, and Home Remedies.” Each chapter, named for a month, begins with a recipe that corresponds to the events in that chapter. Interwoven into Tita’s story are recipe instructions and other home remedies that, along with the narrator’s voice, make readers feel that they are having a friendly chat at the kitchen table. The novel’s format parodies “calendars for young ladies,” which were publications that emerged in the 1800s in the Mexican culture that contained monthly installments of fiction along with recipes, home remedies, dressmaking patterns, poetry, decorating tips, and notices of upcoming events. “Calendars for young ladies” were considered the precursors of modern-day women’s magazines.

Magical realism: *Like Water for Chocolate* features the literary style of magical realism, a style widely used by many Latin-American writers. In magical realism, fantastical elements are matter-of-factly included in writing to create vivid images, show characters’ thoughts and emotions, and reveal the human condition in everyday situations. The novel’s setting usually has historical, geographical, or cultural significance. Fantastical elements include time shifts, multiple viewpoints, folklore, and even supernatural elements. Just as characters accept the inexplicable without question, the readers are expected to do the same. Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier is frequently credited for coining the term “magical realism” since he used the term *lo real maravilloso* (marvelous reality) in the prologue to his novel *The Kingdom of This World*. Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez is noted for increasing the genre’s popularity. The term “magical realism” is also used in relation to visual arts, film, and music.

Mexican Revolution: Primary causes of the Mexican Revolution were repression of political dissent and economic repression of the peasants who made up the vast majority of the population. Under the 30-year dictatorship of President Porfirio Díaz, wealth and power were concentrated in the hands of a few. Prior to the election of 1910, Díaz imprisoned and then released his political opponent, Francisco Madero, who, on November 20, called for an uprising. Díaz’s army was defeated in six months due in large part to the military success of Madero’s allies, including Francisco “Pancho” Villa in the north and Emiliano Zapata in the south. Conditions for the masses improved, and the Constitution of 1917 went into effect. However, political unrest and civil war continued into the 1930s. The Mexican Revolution was a popular uprising and, according to many, continues today as a “work in progress.”

Women played important roles in the Mexican Revolution. Political activists like Dolores Jiménez y Muro and Hermila Galindo spoke out for women’s rights. *Soldaderas*, or women soldiers, from all social classes followed their military husbands, performing camp and caregiving duties. Others fought in battles and some, like Gertrudis in *Like Water for Chocolate*, became officers. The efforts of these women brought attention to feminist issues and resulted in the formation of future organizations.

Chapter One

Born on the kitchen table and raised by Nacha, the family cook, Tita De la Garza's life and understanding of the world revolve around the kitchen and preparing food. When Pedro Muzquiz asks for Tita's hand in marriage, Mama Elena refuses to allow it, insisting that Tita, as the youngest daughter, follow the family tradition by remaining unmarried in order to care of her mother. Mama Elena encourages Pedro to instead marry Rosaura, Tita's older sister. Pedro agrees in order to remain near Tita. Not even Tita's favorite food or the bedspread she began crocheting for her wedding can relieve Tita of the icy grief she feels.

Vocabulary
literally
domain
savor
evoke
ethereal
suffice
repression
audacity
deference
feigning
respite
suffused
presumptuous

Discussion Questions

1. What can you infer from the story of Tita's birth? (*Being born in the kitchen foreshadows the domestic life Tita will lead and implies that she will be a nurturer. As the first fantastical incident, the onion-induced flood of tears alerts readers that magical realism will be employed in the novel, and the tears themselves foreshadow the sadness Tita will face. Nacha's use of salt left over from the tears not only shows the "nothing-is-wasted" mentality of ranch life but also demonstrates the characters' matter-of-fact acceptance of supernatural events in their lives. Mama Elena's acceptance of Nacha's offer to feed Tita implies that this mother and daughter will not have a close, loving relationship.*)
2. How does spending most of her childhood in the kitchen affect Tita? (*It causes Tita to associate food with the joy of living. She develops a "sixth sense" about food and, often, her emotions are transmitted through her cooking. Tita has difficulty understanding the world outside of the kitchen. She is the only one of her sisters to grow up this way, therefore, her viewpoint and opinions differ greatly from her sisters'.*)
3. Discuss the importance of tradition in families and societies. Is Tita right to question the "youngest daughter tradition"? What is the significance of Tita being the first De la Garza to ever question the tradition? (*Discussion should cover the various ways tradition can function, e.g., defines acceptable behavior, provides guidelines to follow in certain situations, teaches lessons from the past, as well as the way traditions differ in various cultures. Tradition can be unchanging—and in this way can be either restricting or comforting—or adapt to meet current conditions. Tita's questioning of the De la Garza tradition seems logical, showing the tradition needs to be adapted. Tita isn't rebellious enough to force a discussion of the tradition with Mama Elena; however, the fact that she questions the tradition is important. Tita is beginning her journey to personal freedom. Tita's protest also exemplifies the novel's feminist ideology.*)
4. Analyze the metaphor that is implied when Chenchu says, "You can't just switch tacos and enchiladas like that!" (p. 14). (*"Tacos" and "enchiladas" represent Tita and Rosaura. Like the two dishes, Tita and Rosaura are different, not interchangeable. Chenchu is appalled that Mama Elena would offer Rosaura in Tita's place. Mama Elena treats her daughters' lives and feelings trivially, as if the choices made in their lives are no more important than switching two dishes at dinner.*)
5. Evaluate Pedro's decision to marry Rosaura to remain near Tita. (*Though his intentions are good, Pedro's decision is not wise and can only lead to trouble and heartbreak for everyone involved. The decision shows Pedro's immaturity, self-centeredness, and inability to stand up to Mama Elena.*)

6. What do Christmas rolls represent to Tita? How do they fail her? *(The rolls remind Tita of the past and are a source of comfort. Instead of easing her distress over Pedro and Rosaura's engagement, the rolls make Tita ill, indicating that food isn't a substitute for love. Though up until now food and cooking have been therapeutic for Tita, they fail to comfort her now. She has tasted true love, and she is no longer content with the things that fulfilled her before—cooking and the kitchen.)*
7. What is the symbolic meaning of the bedspread Tita is crocheting? *(The bedspread was originally intended to be a symbol of love, but its creation becomes an emotional outlet for Tita's sorrow and frustrated passion. It represents Tita's tendency to use domestic activities—which are the only things she is allowed to do—to express her emotions.)*
8. What style of writing is beginning to be used? Do you enjoy the style? Why or why not? *(The author begins to use magical realism, which allows her to exaggerate characters' emotions, stressing their intensity and importance. Integrating recipes and preparation instructions into the text provides an interesting way to advance the plot of the story and foreshadow the themes and events of the upcoming chapters. Although some readers will enjoy this writing style, others may find the abrupt shifts difficult to follow. Answers will vary.)*

Supplementary Activities

1. Keep a list of literary devices (such as metaphors, similes, and personification) as you read the novel, citing the page numbers on which you find them. Write one or two sentences explaining the significance of each literary device.
2. Research memory and smell. Using your research, write one or two paragraphs that explain why smell triggers memory.
3. Write two or three paragraphs explaining the origins of a tradition in your family. Then, rewrite the story using elements of magical realism (such as supernatural or fantastical details) to explain the same family tradition.

Concept Map

Directions: Complete the concept map below using what you know about the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

