



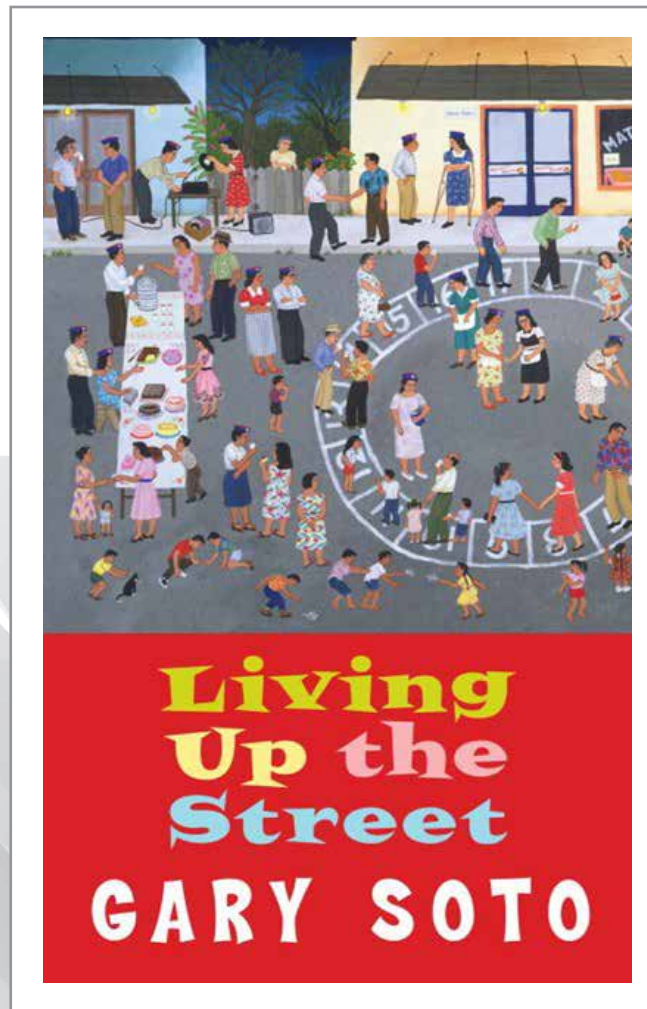
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Living Up the Street

Gary Soto



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Living Up the Street

Gary Soto

## 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!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Comprehension

Creative thinking, identifying attributes, inferring, predicting, problem solving, supporting judgments, concept map

### Literary Elements

Story mapping, characterization, setting, conflict, theme, author's purpose, tone, point of view, cause and effect, figurative language

### Vocabulary

Definitions, word maps, synonyms, root words, sorting

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation, dramatizing

### Writing

Creative writing, personal narrative, dialogue, journalism, biographical sketch, employment application, poetry

### Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, research, compare/contrast, fact/opinion, analysis, evaluation

### Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—culture, history, geography, Chicano Movement, U.S. Border Patrol, volunteering, sports, maps, time line; Health—eye safety; Math—graphs, dominoes, budgeting, economics; Music—German, Spanish; Art—design, illustration, Chicano art

**Genre:** autobiographical narrative recollections

**Setting:** Fresno in California's Central Valley; Mexico; 1950s to 1970s

**Point of View:** first person

**Themes:** growing up in the barrio, falling in love, adolescent rebellion, overcoming obstacles, prejudice, self-discovery, ethnic pride

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

**Style:** narrative (reminiscent)

**Tone:** candid, serious, humorous

## Summary

*Living Up the Street: Narrative Recollections* is 21 autobiographical chapters, beginning with a five-year-old Gary Soto and continuing through his adulthood. Gary grows up in the barrio of Fresno, California. His Mexican-American family labors in fields and factories, yet they live in poverty, especially after Gary's father dies from a work-related accident. Gary attends various schools with his siblings and neighborhood friends, becoming involved in many fights and neighborhood functions like baseball leagues and local contests. Gary contrasts his family life with those on television programs such as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*. The TV families have uncomplicated lives, while violence and prejudice are a part of Gary's everyday life. At 17, he runs away from home and works in a tire factory under miserable conditions with other desperate, unskilled workers. Gary fears he will always "work Mexican hours, and in the end die a Mexican death, broke and in despair" (p. 123). His fear of poverty follows him through college and marriage; it travels with him to Mexico City, and it's there even after he publishes his poetry and wins awards. Still, Gary learns to accept who he is and take pride in his Mexican-American heritage.

## About the Author

Gary Soto was born in Fresno, California, in 1952. He was not a good student, which he attributes to growing up in the barrio. As a child, he never considered becoming a writer; he wanted to be a priest or a paleontologist. While attending Fresno City College, Soto discovered poetry. He began writing his own poems and decided to become a writer. Soto transferred to California State University at Fresno, graduating with a degree in English. He received a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the University of California at Irvine. Soto writes poetry, short stories, novels, and plays for children and adults. He's produced films for children, and he has written a libretto for The Los Angeles Opera. He is an Associate Professor of Chicano Studies and English at the University of California at Berkeley. Soto has won numerous awards, including the 1985 American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation for *Living Up the Street*. He is well-known for writing about Mexican Americans and Chicano culture, yet he says his writing for children is about experiences common to most American children. Soto serves as the Young People's Ambassador for the California Rural Legal Assistance and the United Farm Workers of America. Not only does Soto want to share stories of his heritage; he wants to inspire children to read and write.

## Background Information

*Fresno* is Spanish for “white ash tree”; early Spanish explorers named the region for the trees along the San Joaquin River. Located in the central valley of California, about halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, Fresno County is the nation’s leading agricultural county. It’s known as the Raisin Capital of the World. The city of Fresno is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States.

The Hispanic population makes up the United States’ largest ethnic minority, with Mexican Americans the fastest growing Hispanic group. Mexican Americans are often called Chicanos. The term was once discriminatory. During the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Mexican-American activists changed the meaning to describe their pride in the uniqueness of their mixed American and Mexican heritage. However, not all Mexican Americans like the term because of its political connotations.

Chicano literature focuses on themes such as identity, culture, and discrimination. Usually written in English, Chicano literature, such as *Living Up the Street*, often contains Spanish words and phrases.

## Characters

**Gary Soto:** author and narrator

**Rick Soto:** Gary’s older brother

**Debra Soto:** Gary’s younger sister

**Jimmy:** Gary’s younger half-brother; half Mexican and half white

**Mother:** struggles to support the family

**Father:** dies of a work-related injury

**Other relatives:** Grandma, Uncle Leonard, stepfather

**Childhood neighbors:** Molinas family, Mrs. Moore and her son Earl

**Friends at Romain playground:** Ronnie, Caveman, Rosie and her six brothers, including Raymond

**Karen:** coach at Romain playground

**Well-dressed man:** brings his daughter to Romain playground

**Little John:** Gary’s best friend in elementary and junior high school

**David King:** Rick’s friend; only middle-class person Gary knows

**Frankie T.:** school bully; comes from an abusive home

**Mary Palacio:** in fifth grade, has a crush on Gary; in sixth grade, is popular and ignores Gary

**Judy Paredes:** girl from a wealthy family whom Gary likes

**Ernie Paredes:** Judy’s brother; a school cadet in Gary’s squad

**Scott:** Gary’s best friend in high school

**Jackie:** Gary’s school friend

**Manuel:** baseball coach; patient and fatherly

## Being Mean—Father

Five-year-old Gary Soto lives in the middle of industrial Fresno. While their parents are at work in nearby factories, Gary and his siblings spend their summer looking for trouble. Along with the neighbor children, they fight, steal, and set fires. Gary and his siblings even attempt to set fire to their own house. When Father dies from a neck injury at work, Gary hides his emotions while the family mourns.

Vocabulary
inherently
roundhouse
provocation
nonchalantly
transfixed
shriveled
frenzy
feigned
conspicuous
eulogy
viciously

### Discussion Questions

1. Do you think living on Braly Street, in the middle of industrial Fresno, contributes to the “meanness” Gary and his siblings feel? Why does Gary mention the broom factory? *(Answers will vary. Discussion should include the effects of growing up in a tough neighborhood. Also, consider types of neighborhoods and their similarities and differences. The Molinas live across the street from the broom factory, and the “brutal whack” of straw being made into brooms may symbolize the way the children are growing up.)*
2. Do you think the “fun” things the Molinas teach the Sotos are “normal play,” just kids being kids? *(Answers will vary but should include that some activities—stealing, abusing animals, throwing rocks at cars—are violence, not play.)*
3. Why does Gary say that his family seems “inherently violent”? *(The Soto children teach the Molinas how to fight. Gary’s aunts fight*

*while the men watch, and Uncle Leonard fights in a bar. Gary often takes his “meanness” out on Rick. Gary, Rick, and the Molinas go to extremes to get into fights.)*

4. What does the fight with the new kids on the street tell you about Gary? *(An imagined insult is enough to start a fight, Gary will defend Rick, neither boy wants to lose, and Gary doesn’t want others to know when he hurts. Gary and Rick have the guts to get even with the other kids, and they rationalize the situation so they believe they win.)*
5. On page 4, Gary says, “TV was that powerful.” What does he mean? Do you agree with him? *(TV fascinates Gary, Rick, and Debra to the point of ignoring food. TV programs influence them, like giving them the idea to burn down the house. Answers will vary.)*
6. How would you explain the frenzy Gary and his siblings feel when setting fires? *(The children are bored, looking for excitement, and unsupervised. They’re feeding off each other’s excitement.)*
7. How could you summarize the disciplinary actions of Grandma, Mrs. Molina, and Mother? *(Answers will vary but should include that Grandma and Mrs. Molina give verbal warnings, while Mother yells and spansks.)*
8. What do you learn from the scene with Gary and his parents in the yard at their new house? *(The family is happy and has plans for the future. Father teaches Gary, and Gary wants to please Father.)*
9. Gary says that he did not feel sorrow at the death of his father. Do the details he provides about that time support his statement? *(Answers will vary, but students should infer that Gary is hiding his emotions. He is focusing on details and actions so he doesn’t “hear the things in [his] heart” [p. 10].)*
10. **Prediction:** What other ideas will Gary get from watching TV?

## Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Analysis: Begin a Character Web (see page 28 of this guide) for Gary. Add information as you read the book.
2. Literary Devices: Look for literary devices, such as metaphors, similes, and personification, as you read the book. List the literary devices you find and the page numbers where you find them.
3. Creative Thinking: Gary's relatives work at the Sun-Maid Raisin factory. Read the history of the Sun-Maid Girl pictured on the raisin company's packages at the Sun-Maid Web site ([www.sun-maid.com/about/sunmaid\\_girl](http://www.sun-maid.com/about/sunmaid_girl) [active at time of publication]). Then design a logo for the broom factory down the alley from Gary's house. Create a history for your logo.
4. Comprehension: Gary and his friends ignore Mother Molina when she asks them to behave. When Gary lies about what he and his siblings are doing, Grandma tells him to behave and returns to her house. Write a dialogue between Mother Molina and Grandma about ways to discipline children.

## 1, 2, 3–Looking for Work

Seven-year-old Gary spends his summer at Romain playground, playing with friends, coping with an eye infection, and entering craft contests. When a well-dressed man brings his daughter to the playground, Gary is pleased until the man's daughter falls off the swing, and the man blames Rosie, Gary's five-year-old friend. The man reveals his prejudice against Mexican Americans and fights with Rosie's brothers. As a nine-year-old, Gary contrasts his family with those on TV shows like *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*. Deciding wealth will improve his living conditions, Gary works odd jobs for his neighbors. Gary tries to convince his family that if they improve the way they look, they might get along better in life and white people will like them.

Vocabulary
deliberating
perennial
rabidly
candling
fortitude
incoherently
lanyard
inordinately
contorted
palsied
converged
basted

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is Gary pleased when the well-dressed man brings his daughter to the playground? (*Gary feels he and his friends are being trusted and that their rich neighbors are welcoming.*)
2. Discuss the well-dressed man's actions at the playground. Why do you think he brings his daughter to the playground? Why does he eventually apologize to Rosie's brothers? (*Answers will vary. Discussion should include the man jumping to conclusions about the accident being Rosie's fault, his prejudices, and his temper. The man may realize that he was out of line, or he may have recognized the danger of fighting with Rosie's brothers.*)
3. What might have happened if Gary had shown his scar to the well-dressed man? (*Answers will vary. Discussion should include whether the man's opinion of Mexican Americans will ever change.*)
4. Why are Gary and his siblings supposed to stay inside until one o'clock? Do you think the neighbors know the children are inside the house? (*The police might arrest Mother for leaving her children home alone. Answers will vary.*)

## Culture Concept Map

**Directions:** With a partner or in a group, complete the map below.

