



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Taking Sides

Gary Soto

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

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Gary Soto

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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

Vocabulary

Charades, word maps, synonyms, antonyms, defining, parts of speech, context clues, translations

Across the Curriculum

Science—weather maps, animal research; Art—design and color, collage, mobiles, advertisements, comic strips, illustrations; Drama—reenactments; Technology—Internet research; Social Studies—maps, events, cultures; Sports—research

Listening/Speaking

Dramatizing, interviewing, discussion, oral reports, music

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing, cause and effect, inference

Thinking

Identifying attributes, research, compare/contrast, brainstorming, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking

Literary Elements

Literary analysis, story mapping, plot development, setting, characterization

Writing

Character journal, narratives, creative writing, titles, reports, poetry

Summary

Taking Sides tells the story of Lincoln Mendoza, a Mexican-American boy who moves from a neighborhood in the barrio to a more affluent neighborhood in the suburbs. His loyalties to his former schoolmates are soon tested when he must play in a basketball game against his old school. Lincoln must be true to himself even as he realizes that his identity (who he is and where he belongs) is shaped by his experiences in both worlds.

About the Author

Born in Fresno, California, in 1952, Gary Soto is an award-winning author and poet whose works have appeared in numerous literary magazines, including *Poetry*, *The Nation*, *Ploughshares*, and *The Iowa Review*. His most widely acclaimed poetry collection, *New and Selected Poems*, was selected as a 1995 finalist for the *Los Angeles Times Book Award* and for the National Book Award. He is a recipient of numerous literary awards, a Guggenheim fellowship, and two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The grandson of Mexican immigrants who worked as farm laborers during the Great Depression, Soto focuses much of his literary attention on Chicano-American characters and themes. His characters Lincoln and Tony also appear in the novel *Pacific Crossing*, in which the boys travel to Japan together to study martial arts. Soto's short story collections for young adults include *Baseball in April*, *Local News*, and *Petty Crimes*.

In addition to his work as an author and poet, Soto has also written a libretto for the Los Angeles Opera and produced *The Pool Party*, a film for which he received the 1993 Andrew Carnegie Medal. He resides in Berkeley, California.

Introductory Activities

1. **Previewing the Book:** Have students look at the cover and answer the journalist's questions about what they see: Who? What? When? Where? and Why? Based on their answers, students predict what the book will be about.
2. **Character Journal:** List the main characters from *Taking Sides* and have students choose one. As they read the book, students write regular entries from that character's point of view. Journal entries should reflect on the events of the story. At various points in their reading, have students share their journals with classmates.
3. **Attribute Web:** Create an attribute web (see page 10 of this guide) with students for each of the following ideas: loyalty, decisions, safety, love, and prejudice. Ask students to quickly tell what each word brings to mind. Encourage students to elaborate on particular ideas.
4. **Prediction Chart:** Have students set up a prediction chart (pages 6-7 of this guide) to use as they read the book.

Attribute Web

The attribute web below will help you gather clues the author provides about a character in the novel. Fill in the blanks with words and phrases which tell how the character acts and looks, as well as what the character says and what others say about him or her.

The diagram is an attribute web with a central circle containing a blank line. Four lines radiate from the center to four rectangular boxes: 'Acts' (top-left), 'Feels' (top-right), 'Looks' (bottom-left), and 'Says' (bottom-right). Each box has four numbered lines below it for notes.

Acts

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Feels

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Looks

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Says

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Chapters One and Two

Vocabulary

| | | | |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| laced (2) | urban (2) | <i>hombre</i> (2) | barrio (2) |
| ghetto (2) | <i>vatos</i> (2) | dank (3) | ransacked (3) |
| basking (5) | graphic (6) | eucalyptus (6) | frantically (10) |
| lounged (10) | <i>papas</i> (10) | stucco (11) | opted (12) |
| harangued (12) | aikido (16) | unison (17) | |

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Tony say to Lincoln, "My homeboy moved to the good side of town"? (*Lincoln and his mother moved from the urban Mission District of San Francisco to the suburban town of Sycamore.*)
2. What are some of the reasons Lincoln's mother decided to move from the barrio to the suburbs? (*She was tired of seeing run-down cars outside her house, tired of listening to ghetto blasters and jackhammers, and tired of breathing black smoke from vehicles driving down the street.*)
3. When did Lincoln's mother pack up and move from the barrio? (*when their Victorian flat was ransacked and their TV and stereo were stolen*)
4. How was Flaco injured? (*Flaco's leg was hurt in a hit-and-run motorcycle accident.*)
5. Why does Lincoln say he would rather be playing for Franklin than Columbus? (*He tells Tony, "There's no brown people here...and our coach is a nasty dude. He's got trouble inside his head."*)
6. Why doesn't Lincoln's mother think she can make it to Lincoln's basketball game? (*She works very hard and does not always have time to see his games.*)
7. Compare Lincoln's old neighborhood to his new one. (*His new neighborhood is quiet and neat. The people are distant and dress in suits and drive BMWs. His old neighborhood is noisy and dirty. There were frequent fights in his school but more diversity.*)
8. Why does Lincoln feel bad for his old school? (*The guys from Franklin wear K-Mart sneakers while Columbus kids wear Air Jordans. He does not think that it is fair.*)
9. Why does James think "Flaco" is a strange name for Lincoln's dog? (*His name means "skinny" and the dog is not thin at all.*)
10. Why don't the teachers at Columbus worry much about the students? (*The students are well behaved, and the only worries teachers have are tardiness, lost jackets, and occasional fights in the hallway.*)
11. Why does Monica say she is too busy to play basketball at Columbus? (*She takes piano and her father makes her take aikido.*)
12. Why does James think Monica "knows her stuff" in Spanish class? (*She is Mexican-American and helps him with his Spanish lessons.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Writing/Interviewing: Lincoln is not a common first name. Many people have names that hold special meaning for their family. Have the students research the origins of their name and answer the following questions: What does your name mean? Why did your family give you this name? Are you named after anyone special, like a family member or well-known person? If you could choose another name, what would it be? Why? Have students write a short summary about their name and present it to the class.
2. Research: Have students look on the Internet or in a reference book to find and list at least five historical events that occurred in or near San Francisco, California. The students are to choose one event and write a short report. The report should include dates, people involved, and reasons why this event is important.
3. Literary Analysis/Story Map: Have the students begin a story map (page 11 of this guide) to use as they read this story. As they continue reading, they should add new information about the characters, setting, problems, and events of the story.
4. Literary Analysis/Character: Have the students begin a character attribute web (pages 8-9 of this guide) for each major character in the story. Students should continue adding information to the webs as they read the story.

Chapters Three and Four

Vocabulary

| | | | |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| shafts (19) | grimacing (20) | oblivious (21) | gingerly (21) |
| smirk (22) | trudged (23) | savory (29) | scrappy (30) |
| flinched (32) | shuffled (34) | nudged (35) | hobbled (35) |
| parole (35) | wolfed (37) | glint (38) | hordes (39) |
| poised (39) | amid (40) | pursed (42) | daze (42) |

Discussion Questions

1. Why is coaching basketball exhausting for Coach Yesutis? (*He runs up and down the court yelling at the players, and slaps his clipboard on his thighs when a play is executed poorly.*)
2. Why is the coach upset with the A-team? (*The A-team should be winning the game by a much greater point spread than they are now.*)
3. Why does Coach Yesutis make fun of Lincoln after he hurts his toe? (*Answers will vary.*)
4. Why can't Lincoln understand why Coach is always on his back? (*Lincoln is always on time to practice, he is not a loudmouth, and he never complains about his injuries.*)
5. Why does the coach make the players do three laps around the gym? (*He doesn't think they played their best.*)