



**BLUE
TEACHER'S
GUIDE
TEARS**

HELLO!

Blue Ink Tears is a young adult collection of poetry that explores many topics of daily life including race, culture, identity, love, growing up, family, and more. To best explore this book and its topics with students, there are some key details you should keep in mind as a teacher:

- The author is Dominican and American and his parents are **immigrants** to the U.S. from that island. This shapes his worldview. Therefore, using this book to explore identity with students is a good idea.
- **Poverty** is an issue that was present in the author's community when he was a child, therefore, it comes up various times in the book. Be prepared to engage in conversations where you define poverty and create space for students to express their thoughts on the matter.
- **Race and racism** have played a role in this author's life and as a result, they surface in his poetry. Be prepared to engage in dialogue about what these terms mean to your students, yourself, and how they are discussed in the book.

In this guide you'll find prompts for studying structure, various topics, specific poems, and extension exercises. The book and the guide are ideal for 6th-12th grades. These are all suggestions to inspire holistic teaching.

This book presents you and your students with a great opportunity to build connection, establish community, and find common human experiences.



ANALYZING STRUCTURE

Consider these prompts with students as you analyze the structure of the book and the structure of poems.

The book is divided into three parts: Blue, Ink, and Tears. What do the poems in each section have in common that enables them to be placed together in their section? What do you think "Blue", "Ink" and "Tears" means to the author based on the poems in each section?

What various types of poems did you notice in the book? Find an example of the different poetic structures and discuss what you appreciate in that poem.

What impact do the images have on the experience of reading the book? Explain your thinking.

EXPLORING TOPICS

Use these questions with students as you study the various topics explored in the book.

- Review all the poems about race and social justice. Based on these poems, what do you think the author believes? How does he feel about this broad topic?
- Throughout the book, the author explores ideas about women and womanhood through his lens. What do you learn about what he thinks about the women in his life? How is love of women represented in *Blue Ink Tears*?
- Considering all the poems that explore an aspect of family, what does the author communicate about his values? What does he say about family?
- The author talks about all types of struggles. How does he uplift the reader? What does he say about overcoming struggle in life?

POEM-BASED PROMPTS

"Still Night/Night, Still"

Discuss the rhythm in this poem. Identify the pattern that creates the rhythm and then make connections to the rhythm in this relationship as revealed through the poem.

"Café Con Leche"

What do you think this poem is truly about? Identify all the words and phrases that help the reader understand the analogy this poem is exploring.

"Shoes"

What analogy is the author employing in this poem? What do the shoes symbolize? What is the problem?

"My People"

This poem is a cry for the people the author sees as his community. Who do you think his community is? Identify the allusions in this poem. What symbolism can you see? What theme would you say is prevalent?

"Stay Alive"

Annotate each line of the poem to identify their purpose. Research the events listed in the center. Lastly, ask: "What social commentary is the author making?"

"Found Her"

Who or what did the author find? Cite lines and moments in the poem to prove your guess.

The last two poems

These two poems feature the author's father. What portrait does he paint of him? What details seem to matter to the author about his father? What do you think is the author's purpose in sharing these poems?

"Unexpected Tension"

Summarize the story being told by the author. What was the main conflict? What was the role of race in that conflict? What has the author learned by the end of the poem?

"Truthful Roots"

What do you think the poem is about? How does the physical and visual structure of the poem represent the main idea? What symbolism do you observe? Considering the imagery, what is the author portraying for us?

"Nothing Like the First"

How are the stanzas grouped? What story is the author telling? Using this poem as a mentor text, have students create their own poem of firsts.

"Anger"

Use this poem in partnership with a story and have students connect the process of anger to the character's development.



EXTENSION EXERCISES

Language

There are many poems that feature Spanish words and phrases. Some poems are fully written in Spanish, for example. Bilingualism is a strength and an act of cultural defiance through language preservation, so the author's choice to write and include his home language is an important one. Invite students into a research project where they study issues around bilingualism, including the cognitive benefits of multilingualism, the history of bilingual education, and more. Using the poems in the book, invite them to merge poetry with informational text and analyze how the two genres explore similar topics.

Blackness

Dominicans are part of the African diaspora and the author spends time exploring that element of his identity and history. Engage students in a study about the African diaspora, the slave trade, Dominican history, Blackness, and more. As students come to a deeper understanding of the vastness of Blackness, revisit the poems in *Blue Ink Tears* and discuss the author's point of view. (Related poems: "Mapping My Blackness", "In the Motherland", "Black Denial", and "Truthful Roots.")

Dominican History of Colorism

Using the poem "Black Denial" invite students into a study of colorism, beginning by defining it. Take time to research the dictator Trujillo and his impact on Dominican culture & racial identity. Use the poem to identify how Dominican culture furthers racist ideas.

WRITING EXERCISES

Have students look at all of the haikus in the book. Next, use them as a mentor text. Using the title of each poem, have students create their own.

The poem "Nothing Like the First" tells about growing up and having new experiences. Invite students to identify how the stanzas are grouped and separated. Next, use this poem as a mentor text for their own exploration of "firsts" in their young lives.

The poems "Sweet Dreams" and "Syrup and Pancakes" are about tasty food. Invite students to identify the descriptive writing and notice what adjectives the author uses to appeal to our senses. Next, using these two poems as mentor texts, have students write their own versions of a favorite meal or a favorite food.

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Formerly a 6th -12th grade teacher, Lorena is now a nationally recognized and award-winning anti racist educator. Learn more about her and her work at multiculturalclassroom.com.