

One Book, One City For Kids

Read with us!

One Book, One City for Kids is an annual reading program that encourages upper elementary students to read and discuss the same book. The program also helps to develop a lifelong love of reading among school-age readers, to inspire readers to bring story ideas and themes to life through discussion and creative reactions, and to build collaborative ties between public libraries, school libraries, and area schools.

This year's One Book, One City for Kids selection is *A Hero's Guide to Summer Vacation* by Pablo Cartaya.

About the book

Gonzalo Alberto Sánchez García has never considered himself the hero of his own story. He's an observer, quietly snapshotting landscapes and drawing the creatures he imagines emerging from them. Forced to spend the summer with his estranged grandfather, Alberto William García—the very famous reclusive author—Gonzalo doesn't expect to learn that heroes and monsters are not only the stuff of fantasy.

But that's precisely what happens when Gonzalo's CEO mother, Veronica, sends Alberto on tour to promote the final book in his fantasy series for children and Gonzalo must tag along, even though he feels no connection to his grandfather or the books. Together, they embark on a cross-country road trip from Mendocino to Miami in a classic 1968 Oldsmobile Cutlass S convertible named Mathilde. Over the course of ten epic days on the highway, they will slay demons, real and imagined; confront old stories to write new ones; and learn what it truly means to show up for your family.

About the author

Pablo Cartaya is a New York Times bestselling author, screenwriter, actor, and speaker. His work has been featured in the New York Times, Washington Post, NBC, and on Oprah's Booklist. Pablo has worked with Disney, Apple TV+, and Sesame Street on projects adapted from television series and features. His novels, plays, and translations have been published by Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, McGraw Hill, and Disney Publishing Worldwide. Most recent novels include: *A Hero's Guide to Summer Vacation*; *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora*, *Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish*, *Each Tiny Spark*, the climate dystopia *The Last Beekeeper*; the graphic novel *Curveball*; and several forthcoming film and television projects. Visit him at: www.pablocartaya.com



RELATED EVENT

Author Talk with Pablo Cartaya

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

1:00 – 2:00 pm

St. Cecilia Music Center
24 Ransom Ave NE

Registration required:
www.grpl.org/register

Pablo Cartaya will discuss his writing process and answer questions about his book *A Hero's Guide to Summer Vacation*. This event is designed for upper elementary classes, homeschool students, and community members.

In your classroom

Here are some activities your class can do based on the story and its themes. Corresponding Common Core standards for each activity are included when applicable.

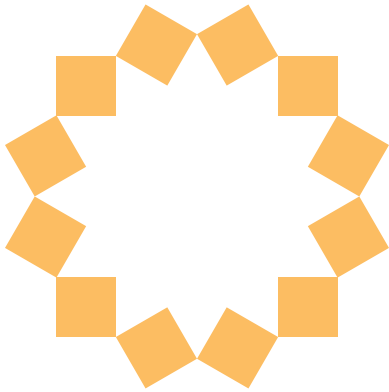
Discussion questions and writing prompts

Have students discuss, either in groups or through writing, one of these questions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.5
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.9
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1

1. The book's epigraph—a quote at the beginning—is from Cuban author Guillermo Cabrera Infante and says, "There is always a relationship between writing and reading, a constant interplay between the writer on the one hand and the reader on the other." What does this mean? What is an example of this "interplay"? Why do you think Pablo Cartaya chose this quote as an epigraph?
2. Gonzalo doesn't like being related to a famous author and says "I wouldn't wish fame on my worst enemy" (pg. 29). Would you want to be famous? What would be good about it, and what would be bad?
3. What do the green eyes in Gonzalo's drawings represent? How does this change as the story goes on?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4
4. Gonzalo's grandfather panics and leaves the signing at the bookstore (pg. 61), but right after that he's happy to meet a young fan named Maria (68). He never visits Gonzalo's school, but he visits the Center for Exceptional Learners multiple times (123). Why is he okay with meeting some fans but not others? What is the difference between these interactions?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3
5. On pg. 9, Gonzalo says "it's hard to tell my mom I don't like something." Why is this hard for Gonzalo? What are some examples in the book of him speaking up for himself?
6. What is the narrator's role in the story, and why does Gonzalo eventually get mad at them (245)?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6
7. What does Gonzalo mean at the end of the book when he says "I get to be the hero of my own story" (265)?
8. The author includes Spanish words throughout the book, including one chapter (204-205) written entirely in Spanish. Why do you think he did this?
9. If you took a road trip across America like Gonzalo and his grandfather, where would you go? What stops would you make along the way? What activities and snacks would you bring along?

Activities



Family History Kit

*Available February 1–28, 2026
at all GRPL locations while
supplies last.*

Designed for kids 5–12 years.

In *A Hero's Guide to Summer Vacation*, Gonzalo learns about his grandfather's past when the two take a cross-country road trip. Use the activities and resources in this kit to explore your own family's story!

1. During their road trip, Gonzalo learns more about his grandfather's past. Talk to a family member about their own history. Where did they live when they were your age? What was school like? What did they do for fun?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3
2. At first, Gonzalo, his mother, and his grandfather all seem very different, but they have many similarities too. Make a chart comparing and contrasting two of these characters.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3
3. Draw a map of Gonzalo and Alberto's trip, showing their stops along the way.
4. Spanish words are used throughout the book. If you don't speak Spanish, write down some of the words in the book and what you think they mean, based on the context in the book. Then look them up in a Spanish-English dictionary. What sort of hints did the author use to help you understand the meaning?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.4
5. On pg. 51, the narrator talks about polysemous words—words that have multiple meanings. How many examples of polysemous words can you think of?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.5
6. The narrator's sections reference the "hero's journey," a type of story structure. Learn more about the hero's journey by watching the video [here: ed.ted.com/lessons/what-makes-a-hero-matthew-winkler](https://ed.ted.com/lessons/what-makes-a-hero-matthew-winkler). What parts of Gonzalo's story correspond to each step of the hero's journey? Are there parts that don't line up? Think of another book or movie you love and how it does—or doesn't—follow this structure.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.9
7. Use your library card to learn more about Cuba by checking out books or using the online resource Britannica School (school.eb.com). Learn more about the Cuban Revolution and why people like Gonzalo's grandfather fled the country.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7

If You Liked *A Hero's Guide to Summer Vacation*

Clean Getaway
by Nic Stone

El Niño
by Pam Muñoz Ryan

Benny Ramírez and the Nearly Departed
by José Pablo Iriarte

Cuba in My Pocket
by Adrianna Cuevas

Mexikid: A Graphic Memoir
by Pedro Martin

The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez
by Adrianna Cuevas

Maizy Chen's Last Chance
by Lisa Yee

Rick Kotani's 400 Million Dollar Summer
by Waka T. Brown

The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise
by Dan Gemeinhart

Lucky Broken Girl
by Ruth Behar

The Trouble With Heroes
by Kate Messner

When I Hit the Road
by Nancy J. Cavanaugh

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