



An Educator's Guide to *Caminar*

Candlewick Press
ISBN: 978-0-7636-6516-6
208 pages
Ages 10 and up

Book Summary:

Set in 1981 Guatemala, a lyrical debut novel tells the powerful tale of a boy who must decide what it means to be a man during a time of war.

Carlos knows that when the soldiers arrive with warnings about the Communist rebels, it is time to be a man and defend the village, keep everyone safe. But Mama tells him not yet—he's still her quiet moonfaced boy. The soldiers laugh at the villagers, and before they move on, a neighbor is found dangling from a tree, a sign on his neck: *Communist*.

Mama tells Carlos to run and hide, then try to find her. . . . Numb and alone, he must join a band of guerillas as they trek to the top of the mountain where Carlos's *abuela* lives. Will he be in time, and brave enough, to warn them about the soldiers? What will he do then? A novel in verse inspired by actual events during Guatemala's civil war, *Caminar* is the moving story of a boy who loses nearly everything before discovering who he really is.

Author Information:

[Skila Brown](#) holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts. She grew up in Kentucky and Tennessee, lived for a bit in Guatemala, and now resides with her family in Indiana. *Caminar* is her first novel.



Word Wall:

disappeared

Rebels

Guerillas

Communist

massacre

Discussion Questions:

Before Reading:

1. What is war? What does it look like? Do children live through it? Are the people involved always active participants?
2. Carlos is a kid who wants to be grown up, though he doesn't exactly know what that means. Do you wish you were older? Why or why not? What do you think being an adult would be like?
3. Carlos worries that his friends think he's not brave. Sometimes he says and does things to make them think he's braver than he feels. Have you ever done something like that? Why?
4. This is a story told through poems. Have you ever read a story told through poems before? Do you think it's possible to tell a story through poems?

After Reading:

1. Carlos changes in this book. How does he change? What changes about him?
2. Imagine you're talking to Carlos. What would you tell him he should do at the end of the book? Why?
3. Some novels lend themselves to be told in poems while others feel right in prose. What do you think makes a story better suited for one than the other?
4. What kind of nahual would you like to have? Why?

Comprehension Questions:

- "Soccer" (p. 6) – What does this poem tell us about Carlos's personality? List two words that might describe him.
- "Roberto" (p. 8) – Poetry often leaves things unsaid. What is implied or left unsaid in this poem? (What happened to Roberto's brother? His father? Why?)
- "Close" (p. 10) – Poetry lines often have double meanings. "They were not that bad" is a line with a double meaning. What is its double meaning?
- "The Army" (p. 11/12) – Based on the ending of this poem, do you think Juan Choc Túc was actually a communist? Why was he killed?
- "In the Fields" (p. 20), "Mariposas" (p. 60), "Cloud" (p. 105) – What examples of symbolism can you find in these poems?
- "What my Eyes Saw From the Window" (p. 26) – In poems we choose our words carefully. Sometimes a word can paint a feeling, picture, image, or emotion in your head, even if it isn't seemingly connected. Do you see any words in this poem that do that?

- “Why I Dropped the Mushrooms” (p. 47) – This is a turning point in the book. Why? What happens?
- There are two dreams in this story, “asleep” (p. 56) and “My Dream” (p. 77.) Dreams in a story often stand in for something the character is thinking or something that’s happening. What do these dreams represent?
- “Almost” (p. 80) and “Guerilla Rain” (p. 24) – Read these poems aloud. Do you hear a rhythm in either poem? Is it significant or symbolic of anything?
- “The Rebels” (p. 93) – When Carlos meets the rebels, why doesn’t he tell them about what’s happened in his village?
- “Everyone” (p. 107) – What do you think Carlos means by “I was not the only one?”
- “Helicopter Clouds” (p. 133) – What did Santiago mean by his story about the fish?
- There are two pairs of similar poems: “Blind” (p. 48) and “I Saw” (p. 154), “I Climbed a Tree” (p. 49 and 171) – How is each pair alike? How are they different? Why?
- What animal is Carlos’s nahual? How does it protect him? How is he similar to that animal?
- “Names in Stone” (p. 191) – Carlos is an adult in this poem, back in Chopán. Why is he there? What is he doing?

Extension Activities

Language Arts:

- “Not Yet” (p. 5) – Carlos is caught between being old enough and too young. Write a similar poem about your own life – what you’re old enough to do but too young to do.
- Santiago Luc is a story teller in his village. Do you know someone in your life who has stories to tell? Interview the person and write down one of the stories you’re told.
- “After They Left” (p. 35) – This is a caught words poem. Like a found words poem, these are snippets of what Carlos hears people saying around him. Take your notebook to a crowded place and write down the snippets of words you hear people saying around you. Can you arrange them into a poem? Don’t forget that placement on the page, white space, and line breaks are all poetic tools.
- Take a favorite book that is written in prose. Read the opening scene. Try to write a poem that would open the book if it were a novel in verse. Likewise, pick a poem from this book and write the scene in prose. Which do you like better? Why?
- Write a narrative letter from Carlos to you, explaining what has happened to his village.
- Write a newspaper article about what happened in Chopán. (You will need background and research about the Guatemalan conflict.) Or you could write an editorial opinion piece about the U.S. involvement in the conflict in Guatemala.
- “I Drank from the Stream” (p. 69) – is a poem that uses a non-living thing, water, to tell the story of what’s happening around it. Think about an object in your classroom, library, cafeteria, bedroom, etc. Write a poem about what’s happening at this moment from the object’s point of view.

- “My Home” (p. 76) – Write a poem about your home.
- “I Remember” (p. 140) – This poem uses all five senses to show what Carlos remembers about his village. Think about a time in your past. Maybe a place you used to live, a school you used to attend, a place you used to visit. Write a similar poem, using all five senses, about what you remember.
- Choose your favorite poem in the book. Write a poem that is similar in content or form.

Social Studies:

- “Santiago Luc” (p. 23) – Santiago remembers a different life in this poem. Interview the oldest person you know. Ask them about the changes they’ve seen.
- “Guerilla Rain” (p. 24/25) – This poem references Guatemala’s climate and the types of seasons it has. Do some research to see how its seasonal climates are similar or different than your own.
- Research Guatemala’s history starting with the coup in 1954. What was the role of the United States? Take a look at United Fruit Company and how its shareholders were in great positions of power.
- Guatemala exports products like coffee, chocolate, fruit, and textiles to the United States today. Most of what we purchase as consumers is not at Fair Trade prices. Research the concept of Fair Trade and think of how it might apply in Guatemala.
- Chopán, Patríchál, and Ixchandé are not real places. The author made up those names. But they are all a nod to the following words: Chapin, Patria, and Iximché. Can you do a little research to determine the significance of those words?
- Find videos online of coffee beans being picked, tortillas being made, and a marimba being played. These are all Guatemala-specific sounds. Think of a sound that is specific to where you live. Write a poem about it.

Students who enjoyed *Caminar*, might also like:

A Long Walk to Water by Linda Sue Park
Home of the Brave by Katherine Applegate
Inside Out & Back Again by Thanhha Lai