



Crazy Loco

Written by David Rice

Speak, 2001, 135 pp.

ISBN: 978-0142500569

This collection of stories set in the Rio Grande Valley provides insight into the unique life of children along the US-Mexico border. The nine stories highlight the importance of family through heart-warming and often humorous accounts of first love, tragedy, and everyday life.

In one story, Romero and Luis portray the lengths that young people go to for their first love. Romero crashes a high school dance for a chance to dance with the most beautiful girl in his class, Veronica. Luis makes his mother buy him an extra special Valentine card for Nina. Both boys lose their friends before the story is over—Romero when he tries to get them to join him where they don't belong and Luis when he betrays his friends to defend Nina's virtue.

Another story tells of Loco, a dog full of adventures that range from trying to take over the wheel to chasing cuetes (firecrackers). Loco dives into a pool that prohibits animals and taunts the lifeguards before they kick him out. He runs into a nopal (cactus) and bravely deals with the pain of hundreds of thorns being removed from his shoulder. Loco delivers laugh after laugh until Dad leaves the keys in the car and someone takes off with Loco from the McAllen Mall.

In a third story, when the California Cousins come to visit Juan and his family, we clearly see how Mexican-Americans from outside the Rio Grande Valley feel about this border culture. The California Cousins look down at the Valley family and call them small Texas Mexicans. Juan and his brother decide to get even by almost blowing up the outhouse with a cuete.

The main characters in the stories represent the differing experiences of Mexican-American children in the Rio Grande Valley as they deal with issues in everyday life. The stories offer young adults ways of dealing with embarrassing family situations and overcoming obstacles to achieve their ultimate goals. Readers experience the stubbornness and passion of the culture through Uncle Roy, Papa Lalo, and Milagros' dad. As longtime residents of the Rio Grande Valley, we easily identified with the majority of the characters. We could see our fathers, uncles, and cousins within the stories. We are familiar with cousins from out of town thinking of us as "Texas Mexicans" implying that we are somehow less worthy than they.

Crazy Loco is an emotional rollercoaster with humor, sadness, and a mixture of emotions throughout the different stories. The language includes code switching prevalent in the Tex-Mex style of speech from the Rio Grande Valley. Aunts and uncles are Tios, firecrackers are

cuetes, and crazy is loco. Readers from this area will find familiar phrases like estan locos, n'hombre no, and huercos sonsos.

Author David Rice was born in Weslaco, TX in the late 1960s. He grew up as a Mexican-American with an adoptive Anglo grandfather. He gathers inspiration for his books from his South Texas and Mexican American cultures. He grew up in Edcouch, a small town in South Texas, and presently divides his time between Austin and his hometown.

The winner of the 2001 ALA Best Book for Young Adults and a 2002 PEN USA Children's Literature Award finalist, *Crazy Loco* could be effectively used in the classroom with emergent bilinguals to address the cultural issues and hardships coming from their Mexican-American culture. Students from every culture would be able to identify with any of the characters as they deal with family and teenage problems.

Crazy Loco can be paired up with other stories about life in South Texas. *Under the Mesquite* (Guadalupe Garcia McCall, 2011) chronicles the life of Lupita who has to take over caring for her family after her Mami is diagnosed with cancer. *Summer of the Mariposas* (Guadalupe Garcia McCall, 2012) depicts the journey of four sisters who are trying to return home after delivering the body of a drowned man they found in the Rio Grande River. They encounter a number of Mexican-American legends including La Llorona along the way. Both stories by Guadalupe Garcia McCall give light into the Rio Grande Valley culture and its beliefs.

Blanca Leal & Yecenia Campos, University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, TX

© 2013 Blanca Leal & Yecenia Campos



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Blanca Leal & Yecenia Campos at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/3/>