



Under the Mesquite

Written by Guadalupe Garcia McCall
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Waiting for la Muerte to take Mamí is like being bound, lying face up on the sacrificial altar of the god Huitzilopochtli, pleading with the Aztec priest, asking him to be kind while he rips my heart out. (p. 157)

Coming of age is often difficult and the subject of many young adult novels. *Under the Mesquite*, however, complicates this focus by presenting readers with Lupita, whose mother is fighting cancer and whose father has given up everything to search for a way to regain his wife's health. Eventually, he leaves his children with Lupita to take Mamí to a clinic. Lupita navigates her first year of high school, her friends' ill-conceived concern, and her growing anxiety over her mother's health while writing of her emotions in ways recognizable to adolescents regardless of geography or social context. Living in the border town of Eagle Pass, Texas, Lupita must also attempt to raise her younger siblings—seven in all—with few resources. A poignant story that will appeal to those who read for character development, *Under the Mesquite* gives readers a glimpse into the culture of those who have lived on both sides of the US-Mexico border while also creating a universal experience around issues of family and loss.

Written in free verse, this novel draws upon the rich border culture of the Southwestern United States. Sprinkled with Spanish and containing a glossary for support in the language, this is a great text to be combined in a unit on self-reliance, family loss, and the need to let go even as we want to hang on. This book could be paired with others such as *Make Lemonade* (Virginia Euwer Wolff, 2006), *Between Shades of Gray* (Ruta Sepetys, 2011), *Out of the Dust* (Karen Hesse, 1999), or *Crossing the Tracks* (Barbara Stuber, 2011). The combination of these marvelous novels would make a great unit on resilience while also taking readers to different geographical locations and time periods. All are written with sensitivity and attend to the issue of loss with great care.

Under the Mesquite contains themes about the importance of family, the significance of geography, the richness of language, the value of poetry and writing, and the implications of loss. Perhaps a quiet book, it still resonates with a love for family, friendships, and community.

Author Guadalupe Garcia McCall was born in Mexico and moved to Texas as a young person. She is a poet, and lives in San Antonio, Texas. More about the author and book,

which won the 2012 Pura Belpre Award, can be found on her website: <http://guadalupegarciamccall.com/> . This book was also named a 2012 Notable Book for a Global Society.

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