



THE
GHOSTS
OF
RANCHO ESPANTO

TEACHER GUIDE



ADRIANNA CUEVAS

ABOUT THE BOOK

A new middle grade novel from Adrianna Cuevas—author of the Pura Belpré Honor Book *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*—about a Cuban American boy who's sent to work on a ranch as punishment for a school prank gone wrong, where he's confronted with a mystery as inexplicable as it is familiar and discovers that uncovering secrets will lead to learning hard truths about himself.

Rafa would rather live in the world of *The Forgotten Age*, his favorite role-playing game, than face his father's increasing restrictions and his mother's fading presence. But when Rafa and his friends decide to take the game out into the real world and steal their school cafeteria's slushie machine, his dad concocts a punishment Rafa never could've imagined—a month working on a ranch in New Mexico, far away from his friends, their game, and his mom's quesitos in Miami.

Life at Rancho Espanto isn't as bad as Rafa initially expected, mostly due to Jennie, a new friend with similarly strong snack opinions, and Marcus, the veteran barn manager who's not as gruff as he appears. But when Rafa's work at the ranch is inexplicably sabotaged by a man who may not be what he seems, Rafa and Jennie explore what's behind the strange events at Rancho Espanto—and discover that the greatest mystery may have been with Rafa all along.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Ghosts of Rancho Espanto is inspired by the real lore surrounding Ghost Ranch, New Mexico. In the summer of 2019, Adrianna Cuevas volunteered there as the ranch librarian. While sorting through boxes of books and organizing collections, she learned about the history of the ranch.

In the 1800s, the Archuleta brothers spread stories of earth babies, monster snakes, and ghosts to scare people away from the area where they kept their stolen cattle. Once the brothers died, the land was later won in a card game by Roy Pfaffle. His wife, Carol Bishop Stanley, turned it into a riding resort after she claimed the ranch in her divorce from Roy. Eventually, the land was bought by Arthur Pack, an environmentalist who sold a tract of land to Georgia O'Keeffe, a famous painter who lived in a cabin at Ghost Ranch for several years. Many of her most popular paintings are inspired by the area. Arthur Pack and his wife, Phoebe, donated the land to the Presbyterian Church in 1955, and Ghost Ranch is now a nonprofit organization providing artistic, scientific, and spiritual workshops amid the stunning natural landscape.

PREREADING ACTIVITY

Students can explore the setting of The Ghosts of Rancho Espanto by watching this YouTube video of the author exploring the land: <https://youtu.be/-RSE26kad7U>

The following article explains the myths and legends surrounding Ghost Ranch: <https://www.curiousarchive.com/ghost-ranch-vivaron/>

Prereading Discussion Questions:

- 1) How do you think rumors about certain places get started?
- 2) Do you usually believe rumors that you hear or do you need more information?
- 3) If you went somewhere and strange things started to happen, would you think the place was haunted or would you believe there was another reason?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) In chapter 1, Rafa and his friends steal the slushie machine from the school cafeteria. Why do you think Rafa let his friends convince him to try such a risky prank?
- 2) Do you think Rafa's dad was fair in the punishment he set up for Rafa?
- 3) In chapter 3, Rafa asks Jonas and Jennie what they would do to save a wild alimancita stuck in a tree. What do their responses reveal about their character? How would you answer the question?
- 4) After his outburst in the barn, Marcus tries to explain himself to Rafa. But Rafa says that sometimes things just happen. Why do you think Rafa has this opinion? Do you think he should've let Marcus explain his actions?
- 5) When the enchiladas in the dining hall are suddenly unspicy, Jennie tries to convince Rafa that the ranch is haunted. What evidence does she use? If you were Rafa, would you believe her?
- 6) When Rafa sees a picture of Jennie with her dad, he wonders if she would want to know the future so she could prepare herself. Would you want to know what's going to happen in the future, even if something bad might occur?
- 7) When Rafa and Jennie are stuck in the collapsed cabin, why do you think Rafa shares a secret about his mom when he's trying to calm Jennie down?
- 8) Rafa explains that books have superpowers in The Forgotten Age. What does each person's book power reveal about their character? What superpower would your book have?
- 9) Before the reveal of the real identity of the man in the green sweater in chapter 16, what evidence did Rafa have of who the man really was?
- 10) With everything bad happening on the ranch, why do you think Rafa still says he doesn't want to go home in chapter 17?
- 11) In chapter 19, Rafa wonders about scars people can't see. What do you think he's talking about?
- 12) Based on their conversation during their video chat, do you think Rafa's mom knows who Manolo really is?
- 13) What do you think will happen once Rafa returns home?



EXTENSION RESPONSES

Select one of the following quotes from *The Ghosts of Rancho Espanto*. Write an extended response explaining whether you agree or disagree with the opinion presented in the quote. Be sure to:

- Clearly state your central idea
- Organize your writing
- Develop your writing in detail
- Choose your words carefully
- Use correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar

1) *No hay mal que por bien no venga*. Every cloud has a silver lining.

2) Sometimes our own brains can be our worst enemy.

3) Healing spells are only real in games.

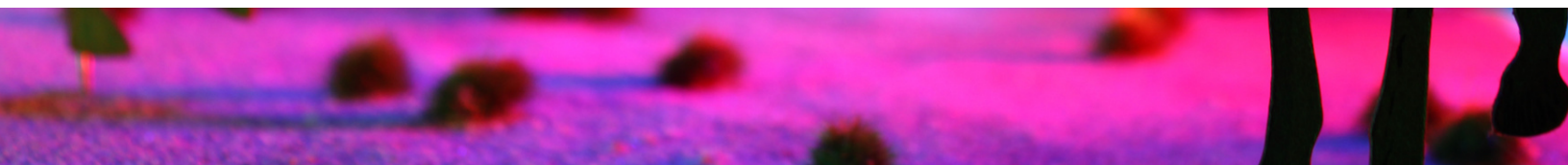
4) Anything broken can be fixed. It may not look exactly like it did before, but it'll be its own version of whole.

FOR FURTHER READING

The Last Last Day of Summer by Lamar Giles

Hide and Seeker by Daka Hermon

Sal and Gabi Break the Universe by Carlos Hernandez



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adrianna Cuevas is the author of the Pura Belpre honor book *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*, *Cuba in My Pocket*, *The Ghosts of Rancho Espanto*, and *Mari and the Curse of El Cocodrilo*. She is a first-generation Cuban American originally from Miami, Florida. After teaching Spanish and ESOL for sixteen years, she decided to pursue her passion for storytelling. Adrianna currently resides outside of Austin, Texas with her husband and son.

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