



Classroom Guide for

**IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS
WAY: A BARRIO STORY/NO TIENE
QUE SER ASÍ: UNA HISTORIA DEL
BARRIO**

Written by **Luis J. Rodríguez**

Illustrated by **Daniel Galvez**

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grades 3–4

Interest Level: Grades 2–6

Guided Reading Level: P

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.6/0.5

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Overcoming Obstacles, Gangs, Coming of Age, Self Esteem/Identity, Peer Pressure, Youth Violence, Conflict Resolution, Friendship, Responsibility, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican American Interest

Synopsis

It Doesn't Have to Be This Way is a compelling tale of a young boy's encounter with the world of gangs—a world that author Luis J. Rodríguez knows firsthand. Through his mesmerizing true-to-life story and the dynamic illustrations of artist Daniel Galvez, we see how a young boy, Monchi, is both attracted to the community of gang life and repelled by its violence.

A neighborhood gang member, Clever, recruits Monchi to join the Encanto Locos. Monchi sneaks out of the house, stands by while members “jump in” a new recruit, tags school property, and downplays his academic success to look cool. Monchi eventually escalates his gang participation when he steals a bike and purchases a knife all to the dread and disappointment of his cousin, Dreamer. In his new activities, Monchi perceives peer and teacher fear as respect.

In this cautionary narrative told in both English and Spanish, Monchi becomes more and more involved in the activities of a local gang until a tragic event involving his cousin, Dreamer, forces him to make a choice about the course of his life. The night Monchi will be “jumped in” to formalize his participation in the gang, Dreamer attempts to stop him

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and is injured in a drive-by shooting from the rival gang. How does Monchi escape gang life? There is no easy answer to his dilemma, but the love and respect of his Uncle Rogelio help him find a way out.

BACKGROUND

From the author: I was involved in gangs from the time I was eleven until I was eighteen. It was a hard way to grow up. Many of my friends from those years are dead, and I'm lucky just to be alive. Today I spend a lot of time counseling young people in gangs. I want to show kids growing up now that they don't have to go through what my friends and I did. That's why I've written this book. Monchi, who tells the story, is like many kids I work with. So are the members of the two gangs—the Encanto Locos and their rivals, the Soledad Night Owls. I know why young people join gangs: to belong, to be cared for, and to be embraced. I hope we can create a community that fulfills these longings, so young people won't have to sacrifice their lives to be loved and valued in this world.

Youth gangs in the United States: There is no widely or universally accepted definition of a “gang” among law enforcement agencies according to the National Gang Center. According to the [National Youth Gang Survey Analysis](#), gang problems are most widespread in cities, and three indicators are used to determine gang magnitude: number of gangs, gang members, and gang-related homicides.¹ In [2011](#), three out of every five gang members were 18 or older and 46% of gang members were Hispanic/Latino, 35% were African American, more than 11% were white, and 7% of gang members were another race/ethnicity.² Males significantly outnumber females in gangs. The [National Gang Center at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention](#) states that factors contributing to local gang violence include: drug-related activities, intergang conflict, return from confinement, emergence of new gangs, intragang conflict, gang member migration within the US and gang member migration from outside the US. Drug-related factors and intergang conflict were the largest influencers of local gang violence.³

According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#), young people typically join a gang between 13 and 15 years old because they need money, a sense of support or belonging, improved peer status, or a sense of protection. Communities have been successful in preventing young people from joining gangs when they experience academic success, positive connections with adult mentors and peers, and effective parenting.⁴ For more information on why children join gangs, early warning signs, and how to help children resist gangs, check out [Changing Course: Preventing Gang Membership](#), a book from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute of Justice and “[Why Young People Join Gangs and What You Can Do](#)” by the Violence Prevention Institute.⁵ [Gangfree.org](#) and the [National Campaign to Stop Violence](#) are non-profits with parent education programs, youth gang prevention curricula, and outreach and referral services.^{6,7}

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Questions**

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

¹ <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Survey-Analysis>

² <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/about/FAQ>

³ <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/>

⁴ <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/youthviolence/preventgangmembership/index.html>

⁵ <http://www.violencepreventioninstitute.com/youngpeople.html>

⁶ <http://www.gangfree.org/>

⁷ <http://www.dtw.org/>

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Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. Take a look at the front and back covers. Take a picture walk. Ask students to make a prediction. Do you think this book will be fiction or nonfiction? What makes you think so? What clues do the author and illustrator give to help you know whether this book will be fiction or nonfiction?
2. What is a gang? Why might someone join a gang? What effect do gangs have on schools, neighborhoods, and families? How might others help when a person is faced with pressure or threats from a gang?
3. What is peer pressure? Why is it hard to resist peer pressure? Share a time you had to make a tough decision because of peer pressure. Why is it sometimes hard to make the *right* decision?
4. Why do you think I chose this book for us to read today?

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

Talk about the title. Ask students what they think the title means. Then ask them what they think this book will most likely be about and who the book might be about. What do you think might happen? What information do you think you might learn? What makes you think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, introduction, English and Spanish text, illustrations, author and illustrator bios, dedications, and acknowledgments.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out what motivates Monchi to resist joining the local gang and to what the title, *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*, refers. Encourage students to consider why the author, Luis J. Rodríguez, would want to share this story with children.

Have students also read to determine why the text is written in both English and Spanish.

VOCABULARY

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below. Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

CONTENT SPECIFIC

blockhead	mechanic	homeboys	barrio	starched
spark plugs	tune-up	getting jumped in		

ACADEMIC

counseling	embraced	longings	sacrificed	vacant lot	moaning
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In addition to the Spanish-language version of the story, there are a few Spanish words in the English text. English translations mostly follow the Spanish words and students have enough context clues to practice inferring the meanings of the words.

If your class has Spanish-speaking students, encourage them to volunteer to translate the words for their classmates. In doing so, these students can feel proud of sharing the role of teacher to their peers.

AFTER READING**Discussion Questions**

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1 and 3)

1. Who is Clever and what does he want from Monchi?
2. How does Clever persuade Monchi to join the Encanto Locos?
3. How do the Encanto Locos use kids like Monchi and Clever?
4. How does Monchi feel about Dreamer? How would you describe their relationship?
5. What advice does Dreamer give Monchi?
6. What are the (positive and/or negative) consequences of gang involvement for Monchi?
7. What are some signs of his gang involvement?
8. What is an example of peer pressure in the story?
9. What changes Monchi's mind about joining a gang?
10. What does Monchi's uncle represent him for?
11. What does "getting jumped in" mean? What is the purpose of this practice?
12. How does Monchi act when Dreamer gets shot?
13. What does Monchi get from hanging out with the older boys in the Encanto Locos gang?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strand 4–6)

1. What is Monchi's childhood like?
2. What does Monchi try to prove by stealing a bike, buying a knife, and destroying school property? Why does he have to prove anything?
3. Why doesn't Dreamer want Monchi to join the Encanto Locos? How does Dreamer treat Monchi when he hangs out with Clever? What does this tell you about the kind of relative Dreamer is?
4. At the end of the story, the Encanto Locos plan to exact revenge on the Soledad Night Owls for shooting Dreamer. What does that tell you about the Encanto Locos?
5. What choice does Monchi have in joining the gang? Why doesn't his uncle make the choice for him? Will joining the gang benefit Monchi or others? Will resisting the gang benefit him or others?
6. Why does Monchi decide not to join the gang? Why might it be hard to break away from a gang?
7. Who are Monchi's *real* friend(s)? What makes someone a real or true friend? How does Monchi figure out who really cares about him and who he really cares about?
8. How does Monchi change from the beginning to the end of the story?
9. What do you think the author wants you to learn from Monchi's experience?

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10. Monchi loves poetry, working on cars with his uncle, and hanging out with his cousin, Dreamer. However, Monchi also steals a bike, buys a knife, and tags the school with graffiti. Do his actions determine who he is as a person? Can someone make a mistake and still be a *good* person?
11. Does Monchi have responsibility for Dreamer being shot? Why do you think so?
12. Why would the author, Luis J. Rodríguez, title the book, *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way: A Barrio Story*? To what does “it” refer? Why does he call this a barrio story?
13. Why does Monchi say, “It doesn’t have to be this way” at the end of the story?
14. Dreamer risks her life to protect and advise Monchi about gangs. How was Dreamer’s relationship with Monchi important to his decision not to join the gang?

Literature Circles

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to the ones in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for lines or sentences in the story that suggest how Monchi and Dreamer demonstrate responsibility.
- The **Illustrator** might illustrate what a young person could say and do to avoid joining a gang if they were recruited to become a member.
- The **Connector** might find another book about gangs, bullying, or youth violence and compare how the central idea and author’s message in each book are similar and/or different.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group’s reading and discussion points for each meeting
- The **Investigator** might look for information about the reasons young people join gangs and the consequences of gang involvement.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *GETTING STARTED WITH LITERATURE CIRCLES* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *LITERATURE CIRCLES: VOICE AND CHOICE IN BOOK CLUBS AND READING GROUPS* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *LITERATURE CIRCLES RESOURCE GUIDE* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader’s Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader’s response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. The author, Luis J. Rodríguez, includes a 1965 photograph of himself as a gang member, and this book was published in 1999, which shows how young people have struggled with gangs for a long time. Explain whether this story is still relevant to young people today or not. Is it effective in convincing young people about the dangers of joining a gang today?
2. Which parts of the book did you connect to the most? Which parts of the story did you connect to the least? Why? Have you ever been bullied or experienced peer pressure? How did you feel? What did you do to handle the situation?
3. Do you think Monchi’s “not fitting in” excuses his behavior to join the gang at the beginning of the story? Do you think his age excuses his behavior? Why or why not.

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4. Monchi's uncle, Tío Rogelio, and his cousin, Dreamer, support Monchi in his decision not to join the neighborhood gang. How do Monchi's relationships with his uncle and cousin affect Monchi and his decision to avoid the gang? Who in your life helps you when you are having trouble? What has this person taught you? Who do you turn to for advice when you have a tough choice to make?
5. Is a person ever too young to make a decision for himself or herself? Should Monchi's uncle or mother make the decision not to join the gang for him? Why does Monchi have to make this decision for himself? Has there been a time you had to make a decision that an adult could not make for you? What happened? How did the experience make you feel?

ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader. Students who speak Spanish can help with the pronunciations of the Spanish words in the book.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they admire about a character or central figure in the story.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Student who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 9)

(Writing Standards, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9)

1. Have students research their school's or district's policies on gangs, bullying, and/or violence. What do the policies say about parents, teachers, and administrators' roles

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in helping students avoid gangs, bullies, and/or violence? How might these policies be improved to better educate the school community and protect students?

2. What local resources are available to students and families? Have students research a non-profit or government agency in their community that helps families and students learn about and resist gang involvement. Write a letter to the editor of the newspaper or the director of this organization suggesting how it might be improved.

Writing

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4)

1. Prepare a two-column list citing 1) the reasons why a young person might become involved in a gang and 2) the consequences of joining a gang.
2. Movies, television programs, video games, and music often glamorize gang life and make it seem cool. Write about why you think there are more incidents of violence than nonviolence in media or one type of media. Do you think seeing, reading, or hearing about violence and gangs influences the way young people act in real life?
3. What is a role model? Write a paragraph about the responsibilities of a role model. Describe the qualities that make someone a positive role model. Who is your role model? Why? For whom are you a positive role model?
4. In an editorial to your school or local newspaper, argue whether or not you think celebrities have a responsibility as role models to young people who admire them. Should celebrities be concerned about how their actions in media and real life might affect young people's thinking about violence? Why or why not?
5. Choose one of the characters in the book to analyze. Describe what kind of role model Tío Rogelio, Clever, or Dreamer is. Examine this character's thoughts and actions that prove this character is a strong or weak role model for Monchi. Argue who will help Monchi achieve his goals and be successful in life.
6. Imagine your friend or a sibling is thinking of joining a gang. Write a letter or an email to persuade him or her why participating in a gang is a poor choice. Provide advice to try and convince the person not to get involved in a gang. Suggest activities the person might participate in instead and ways to your friend or sibling feel better about himself or herself and his or her friendships?
7. How would this story be different if told from Dreamer's perspective? Write a diary entry about one or more of the scenes from Dreamer's point of view.
8. Middle school students may wish to submit a written piece to the annual [Do the Write Thing Challenge](#) by the National Campaign to Stop Violence.⁸ Student entries address how violence has affected their lives, the causes of youth violence, and what can they do about youth violence. Check out <http://www.dtw.org> for submission rules.

Performing Arts

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4 and 6)

1. Organize students into small groups and have each group create a skit about resisting gangs. The skits might involve acting out a scenario, song, dance, or poem. In their skits, students should explain why they are choosing not to get involved in a gang. Students may also wish to perform their skits for other classes in their grade or lower grades.
2. With a small group of students, make a Reader's Theater script with *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*. Choose students to say the speaking parts of Monchi, Dreamer, Tío

⁸ <http://www.dtw.org/the-challenge/instructions>

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Rogelio, and Clever. Choose two or three narrators to set each scene. Have students perform the story for the rest of the class.

Home-School Connection

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 2 and 3 and Production and Distribution of Writing, Strand 4)

1. Have students interview a parent, grandparent, or guardian about the difference between a good group and bad group. Students may ask questions such as the following and record the answers to share with the class: What positive activities can young people do in a group? What fun activities can young people do when they are not in a gang? Why do some groups break the law or hurt people? Who should a young person talk to if someone tries to recruit him or her into a gang? Who should the young person tell?
2. Have students write portraits of people who are personal role models. Who are their role models? Why do they admire these people? What have these people taught them? What actions and qualities of their role models do they admire most?
3. Ask students to imagine that someone wants to recruit them for a gang or wants to fight them. Encourage students to brainstorm with a parent, grandparent, or guardian ways they could tell the person no and move away without losing face? Have students record the ideas generated from the brainstorming session and share them in class.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Luis J. Rodríguez is the critically acclaimed author of *Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A.*, the inspiring story of how he found a way out of gang life in Los Angeles. Now a prominent poet, author, and educator, Rodríguez frequently travels throughout the country educating the public about youth and violence and counseling young people in gangs. He lives in Chicago with his wife and their two sons. His website is <http://www.luisjrodriguez.com>.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Daniel Galvez has been creating public murals since 1976. His photo-realist style and focus on the strength of the human spirit have earned him numerous awards and national recognition. His public commissions have included a mural on Chinese immigration to California, a memorial to Vietnam veterans, and a tribute to Malcolm X at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem, New York. Galvez and his wife live in Oakland, California.

Awards and honors *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way: A Barrio Story* has received include:

- Honor Award Winner, *Skippping Stones Magazine*
- Americas Award Commended List, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies

Book Information

\$8.95, PAPERBACK

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32 pages, 8-1/2 x 10-3/4

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way: A Barrio Story* at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/467/pb/it_doesn_t_have_to_be_this_way_a_barrio_story_no_tiene_que_ser_así_una_historia_del_barrio

Order Information

On the Web:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/ordering.mhtml> (general order information)

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/467/pb/it_doesn_t_have_to_be_this_way_a_barrio_story_no_tiene_que_ser_así_una_historia_del_barrio (secure online ordering)

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