

## How to Date a Flying Mexican

By Daniel Olivas

Illustration by Joe Cepeda

Curriculum developed by Andrew Ramirez



### OVERVIEW

#### Quick-Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

Student Population	
Age/Grade-Level Appropriateness	* 16-18/ 11th - 12th grade
Genre/s	* Memoir * Magical Realism
Length	* 4472 words (25 minute read)

Content Advisories	* Cheeky PG-13 sexual references
One-Sentence Summary	The author, Dan Olivas, reflects on his trajectory as a writer as well as his relationship with his father, through a story his father loved: About a woman who married a man with an incredible secret ability.
<b>Lesson Planning</b>	
Topics & Key Themes Overview	<p><b>Topics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Father/son relationships</li> <li>* Mother/daughter relationships</li> <li>* Catholic culture</li> <li>* Breaking traditional norms</li> <li>* Sibling relationships</li> <li>* The possibility of a supernatural world</li> </ul> <p><b>Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Trust/Faith</li> <li>* Tradition/Expectation</li> <li>* Honesty</li> <li>* Culture</li> <li>* Family</li> <li>* Acceptance</li> </ul>
Historic Events/Time Period for Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The heritage of Magical Realism</li> <li>* Chicano Culture</li> </ul>
Complementary Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Poem (w/ Audio): <a href="#">Queerodactyl</a> by <a href="#">Roy G. Guzman</a></li> <li>* Article: <a href="#">“What Is Magical Realism in Art” (The Collector)</a></li> </ul>
Author	<b>Daniel Olivas</b> is an author and lawyer who lives in Southern California.
Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)	<p>Grades 9th-10th Common Core Standards:</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.B            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.A            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.C</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1</p>

## Author Biography

Dan Olivas participated in readings at Vroman's at LitFest Pasadena 2022. By day, Daniel is a government lawyer who specializes in environmental enforcement and land use. He is also the author of eleven books and editor of two anthologies. He has also penned three plays. <https://danielolivas.com/>

## Artist Biography

Born and raised in East Los Angeles, a proud Angeleno, Cepeda's serpentine road through college began studying engineering at Cornell and finished with a BFA in Illustration from Long Beach State. Only months from leaving school, he secured a book contract after his first meeting with a publisher. He's been illustrating books ever since. Cepeda is the award-winning illustrator of more than thirty books for children while continuing to create images for magazines and other publications. <https://www.joecepeda.com/>

## SYNOPSIS

Dan Olivas, the author of the story, reflects on what drives him to write, and how he shared his literary passion with his late father. The story we are about to read, it turns out, was his father's favorite. In the story, Conchita, a middle-aged woman, is happily unmarried. Conchita's new boyfriend, Moises, amazingly can fly... or as he puts it, "levitate." In an attempt to make sense of this, Conchita examines religious mythology and seeks the advice of her family (both living and dead) to comprehend this amazing and mysterious man in her life. Ultimately, Conchita vows to keep Moises's great ability a secret, as she fears he will be taken from her if the news gets out. The story concludes with Conchita vowing to teach her boyfriend one of her skills, if he teaches her one of his.

## CURRICULUM

### Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

#### Topic

25 minute writing activity:

In a thoughtful written response, examine the following prompt:

Are "secrets" a good thing or a bad thing in our world? Think about the different secrets people might keep, as well as reasons for why people might keep a secret. Also, remember a secret can be kept by one person, or a group of people. With all this in mind, are "secrets" a positive or negative in our world?

*Note: For your answer, you may examine "secrets" any way you choose — for instance, you may examine the secrets a girlfriend may keep from her boyfriend... or you may examine the secrets a government may keep from its people. Whatever level of secrets you choose to explore, assert whether you believe they are good or bad for our world.*

#### Main Ideas

Small-Group Discussion:

As a group, address the following prompt: Is it good or bad to "break" tradition?

Before you answer, have each group take a notecard and write one "tradition" on the notecard. These traditions can range anywhere from benign — wearing green on St. Patrick's Day — to more

meaningful: like a quinceañera where the whole family attends. At the end of the day, traditions take many different forms, so take a minute to consider all the different types of tradition in your world and beyond.

After, share your traditions with the other people in your group. Explain why you chose that tradition, and what, if any, connection it has to your life.

Then, revisit the initial prompt: Is it good or bad to break tradition?

During: Have a designated notetaker keep track of your key discussion points

After: Share the highlights of your discussion with the class

### Passage-Specific Themes

Small-Group and Class Discussion:

Read the following passage from “How to Date a Flying Mexican.” Discuss the questions below in small groups, then share your ideas with the class:

*So, you see, no one can find out about her novio’s penchant for flying. Period. Conchita’s good fortune cannot be tarnished by this slightly odd behavior. While keeping this secret, she will proudly introduce him to her comadres at tardeadas, quinceañeras, and funerals even if they have already recognized Moisés Rojo as Conchita’s recently widowed but still vigorous next-door neighbor. And people will, indeed, nod with approval because this woman (¡finalmente!) has found a solid, handsome, and age-appropriate gentleman who maybe—just maybe—will ask her to marry him. And perhaps—they will say—Conchita will come to her senses after all these years of “dating” charming but useless men and allow the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church to bless their union in a proper Mexican wedding. Because in God’s eyes, it is never too late for sinners as long as they are still living and breathing and taking up space on this miraculous place we call Earth.*

**Question One:** Why is Conchita nervous about family members finding out about her boyfriend’s special ability? Do you believe her family would react negatively or positively to knowing that Moises can fly? As you answer, consider what aspects of tradition or culture would “form” the family opinion of Moises.

**Question Two:** What does this passage tell us about Conchita’s character or personality traits? How does the author use details and structuring in this passage to highlight Conchita’s personality. Do you believe this passage gives us a good idea of who Conchita is? Why or why not?

### Universal Themes

What role should family play in an individual’s life? Is it OK for a family to judge the decisions of one of its family members? Or should families accept or “go with” anything a family member does. In other words, what level of input should a family have on personal decisions made by an individual family member?

HINT: To answer this question, it is perfectly fine to speak generally about families you’ve read about in the news or history (or even this story!). You may also specifically speak to your personal experience of family too, if you are comfortable doing so. Whatever direction your answer takes, be sure to explore your claims in depth and provide plenty of examples to balance your claim as to what role family should play in individual decision making.

## Key Vocabulary

Definitions are context-dependent. Make sure any definitions you look up or work from are the ones that most correctly fit in the context of the story.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three
havoc	imbued	Chicano
billow	Shamanistic	noxious
eloquent	inexorably	Magical Realism
broach	penchant	inevitable
mantra	destitute	rhetoric

## Vocabulary Activity Options

### ACTIVITY 1:

STEP ONE: Think about ONE superpower you'd like to have. For example, the ability to walk through walls. Or the power of superspeed. Write your superpower down on the notecard and share it with the group. As you share be sure to explain the following 3 things:

- WHY you chose this super power
- HOW society will interpret your superpower
- IF society will be threatened by you, or scared of you

STEP TWO: With the group discussion of your superpower in mind, write a short story about what it would be like to LIVE with your superpower. Don't just consider all the spectacular things you would do... also consider how this superpower would change your relationship with friends and family. Your short story can be as creative or realistic as you'd like, just be sure to discuss how it would be to live out a day with your superpower.

STEP THREE: Look up the word "magical realism." In what way is your short story adhering to the rules or characteristics of magical realism. If time remains, share your story with the class, and let students identify moments of magical realism.

### ACTIVITY 2:

Write a conversation between two people, about anything you wish, that realistically incorporates 8 of the vocabulary words above. By realistically, this means do not randomly include the words. Rather, work them in by understanding their definition and their usage in a sentence. (HINT: If you need some ideas, search the word in a search engine to see how other writers have used the word.)

## Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. Do you think Conchita is correct or logical in worrying about sharing Moises's secret with the world?

2. Do you think Moises and Conchita are a good match for a relationship? Why or why not?
3. Why does Moises insist on using the word “levitate” instead of fly, when describing his rare ability?
4. Do you believe Conchita can learn to “levitate” like Moises, after he teaches her? Why or why not?
5. In relationship to this story, as well as what you know about the genre Magical Realism, what might Moises’s ability to levitate *symbolize*?

### \*\* Text-Dependent Question Options

1. What do Conchita and her sister have in common with each other? How does their relationship differ from, say, the relationship Conchita has with her other family members?
2. How does Conchita’s interaction with her mother’s ghost differ from a typical ghost experience that you might read or hear about? In what way does this interaction affect the tone or “feel” of the story? Explain.
3. What is the significance of the last line of the story: “And finally, we hope that you remember the most important lesson of all: Do not forget to breathe.” What makes this seemingly obvious advice so important? Other than the literal act of breathing, what do you think the narrator is figuratively referring to, with this last piece of advice?
4. How does the author’s introduction to this story affect or adjust your understanding of the the story, “How to Date a Flying Mexican?”

## Writing Exercises

### Narrative

Despite the magical quality in “How to Date a Flying Mexican,” at its heart, the story describes a character’s struggle to connect with family. In particular, it highlights Conchita’s struggle to introduce her boyfriend, Moises, to her kin. With this in mind, think of a time when you had a TOUGH time doing something. It doesn’t have to be connected to a challenging moment in a relationship. Maybe you had a big school project to finish. Or maybe you had to tell someone close to you some difficult news. Or maybe you were faced with a difficult day and had no choice but to rise to the challenge. Whatever your story is, take the reader through your FULL experience so they can empathize with your moment. And lastly, be sure to explain how everything worked out! Happy writing.

### Descriptive

#### *Rule 5: Don’t Google the Word Levitation*

*The same morning Conchita decided, once and for all, that it would be best not to share with Julieta her little secret, she decided to do some research on her novio’s special talent. She typed in “levitation” on Google and got over 2 million hits. Too many to go through. How could she limit her search? Ah! One of the books Moisés loved to read was entitled *The Gateway to Eastern Mysticism*. Conchita added the words “eastern mysticism” to “levitation” and got 15,263 hits. Much more manageable*

In the passage above, the author describes Conchita’s process of Googling something, giving us rich insight into the type of person Conchita is: curious and a little neurotic.

In your own writing, your challenge is to describe a person without using adjectives (for instance you cannot use descriptor words like fast, smart, funny, tall, etc.). Rather, in the same way Olivas gives us insight into Conchita by showing and not telling... give us insight into someone or something, either real or imagined, without directly describing them.

HINT: The easiest way to accomplish this task is by having someone DO a task, but in a way that showcases their personality too. For instance, if you want to describe a mean troll without saying "mean" you could describe the troll dragging its dirty unwashed feet across someone's freshly-cleaned living room floors. What a jerk, right?

Whatever shape your story takes, practice "showing" the reader who your character is, without directly describing them.

If time permits, read your story or an excerpt of your story to the class. After, have the class say some adjectives to describe your character, based on their understanding of the story. (Are these the adjectives you had in mind as you wrote your story?)

### Complementary Text Option

Listen (and follow along) to the poem "[Queerodactyl](#)" by Roy G. Guzman:

*Jewelry boom box spittin' bidi bidi bom bom  
he verges his groove of slapstick smoke*

*across our donated mosquito nets bidi bidi bom  
bom all night he fingertips our omnivorous junk*

*in his cruel maw of tooth gaps magical realistic  
funky ass choral arrangements of servitude mighty*

*dump truck hip-ee hip-ee dales my rotunda all  
over these unsullied shimmies bidi bidi bom bom*

*orb-spider thighs cloaking his genocidal hunches  
Momma catapulting protection abracadabras*

*over our twiggy panopies we painstakingly  
bedecked how many times haven't we fallen*

*for mishandled precipices in the wrongheaded  
entirety of machomaniac evacuation asteroid*

*in mouth-crooked chaps guayabera deep pink  
guava pulp rum & coke in his fierce prayerful*

*grip to bypass civility a Google-translated wink  
innumbrated eyebrows to cast embered mercies*

*I pump bidi bidi bom bom hormonal harmonies  
for his jawlined mitzvahs bidi bidi bidi bidi bidi*

*on wings only light will kerfuffle flight born  
at his bidding va-voomed for his favor we puff*

*from the tail of his pickup truck we clothes-  
line an underwater continent marooned & whiplashed*

*for genesis if carnage can charade competency  
we too can corrupt castanets timbre compulsory*

*penances over his padded knees bidi bidi bom bom  
above his life insurance policy rates coma*

*with anointed vanity with the right song a stone  
will pass for bread break for a fool's sunrise achieve*

*the love ritual cut scorn's willy bob hither to this bomb*

## \*\* Creative Writing Exercise

**PREWRITING DISCUSSION:** Notice the way Guzman does away with proper punctuation to stylize the poem, and make it feel somewhat like a rant. This poem also takes on a stream of consciousness quality where the words have an authentic sound and rhythm, beyond their literal meaning. Altogether, this poem reads with a kinetic energy that takes the reader to the very end.

Your task is to write a “rant” of your own. Here are the rules:

1. Write for 5 minutes straight without stopping (or stopping as little as possible. A break to rest your hand is OK). The idea is to “flow” with your thoughts, without analyzing them as you write.
2. Do not worry about punctuation or proper grammar
3. After you write for 5 minutes, spend a quick 2 minutes editing your work for quality and coherence
4. Share your work!

## Interactive Classroom Activity

STEP ONE: Students will read and quietly annotate the article: [What is Magical Realism in Art?](#)

STEP TWO: Take some time to discuss and share your understanding of the definition of Magical Realism, as well some of the artwork you encountered in the article from Step One. What made this art interesting to you? What consistent styles or similarities did you notice across a few pieces of art?

STEP THREE: Explore this AI art generator [here](#). This technology works by generating images based on keywords associated with images pulled from the internet. Your task, after exploring and generating a few “test” images, is to create a movie poster for the story, “How to Date a Flying Mexican.”

NOTE: As you create, don’t just be random... consider the words you are using, and think about how you might explain the connection between the art and the story.

If time remains after, students who are willing may share their images and explain how it connects to the story “How to Date a Flying Mexican” by Dan Olivas.



**COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE**

*This story and its exercises are appropriate for 9th grade and above. 9th- and 10th-grade standards are cited.*

**Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C: Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2: Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3: Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

**Vocabulary Activity Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). (See grade 9–10 Language standards 4–6 for additional expectations.) CA.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

**Post-Reading Class Discussion Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A: Analyze a. Apply grades 11–12 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.B: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning [e.g., in U.S. Supreme is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious Court Case majority opinions and dissents] and the premises, purposes, and reasoning.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.A: Introduce a topic or thesis statement; organize complex ideas, concepts, a. Introduce a topic or thesis statement; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes )d include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics, multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B: Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, oc( extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A: Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

**Text-Dependent Question Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

**Writing Exercise Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.C: Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas d and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A: Analyze a. Apply grades 11–12 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B: Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A: Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

### **Complementary Reading Text (Comparative Writing Exercise)**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). (See grade 9–10 Language standards 4–6 for additional expectations.) CA.

### **Activity Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B: Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.