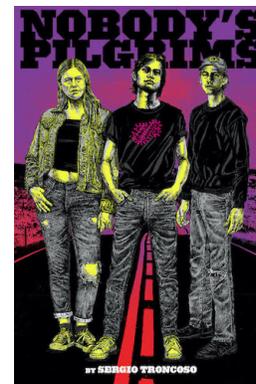


Teacher's Guide for *Nobody's Pilgrims*, by Sergio Troncoso

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Summary:

Three teenagers in search of their American Dreams drive across the country in a stolen pickup as evil people are after the contraband hidden in their truck. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* meets *No Country for Old Men*.

Main Characters:

Turi Martinez- a sixteen- (almost seventeen-) year-old Mexican American from the Ysleta neighborhood of El Paso, Texas

Arnulfo Muñoz- a seventeen-year-old Mexican from Chihuahua who is an undocumented immigrant

Molly Crump- a seventeen-year-old from Steepleville, Missouri who is also an orphan like Turi

Other Characters:

Seferina Alvidrez- Turi's aunt who lives in Ysleta

Ramon Alvidrez- Turi's uncle who also lives in Ysleta

Vanessa Alvidrez- Turi's sixteen-year-old cousin who lives in Ysleta

Tía Romita- Turi's great aunt who lives in Juárez, Mexico

Mrs. Garcia- the librarian at Ysleta High School who Turi has a crush on

Juanito- an old man who works for Dunbar at the chicken farm in Clint and who has a tattoo of a wolf or a black dog on his forearm

John Broadus Dunbar (a.k.a The Stetson)- owner of the chicken farm in Clint, businessman, and U.S. distributor for drug lord Don Ilan from Mexico

Don Ilan (a.k.a. El Luchador)- Drug lord from Mexico who is head of the Guerrero Group, lives in Tecoaapa, south of Acapulco, and always dons Mexican wrestling masks for secrecy

Chucho- one of Dunbar's most important men from Clint, a poetry reader

Eduardo- one of Dunbar's younger men, Chucho's friend, an Adonis in a black t-shirt

El Hijo de Huerta- Don Ilan's top henchman, the Babe Ruth of narcos, a lover of antique dolls

El Tapado- mysterious terrorist who wants to destabilize the U.S. and Don Ilan's top customer

Jim Crump- Molly's brother who lives in Steepleville, Missouri

Corina Cump- Jim's live-in girlfriend

Rudy Fernandez- owner of The Colonial Settler, a diner/Mexican restaurant in Kent, Connecticut

Mimi Fernandez- Rudy's wife who also works at their restaurant

Oscar Fernandez- Rudy's younger brother who works at the restaurant, an undocumented immigrant

Cosio Torgenson- a retired Danish architect from New York City who has a weekend house in Kent with his wife Miriam

Miriam Torgenson- a retired Jewish school administrator from New York City, Cosio's wife

Discussion Questions:

(An asterisk * signifies a potential long or short essay question.)

*1. Compare Turi's pastoral, idyllic portrait of Connecticut and New England in El Paso to the reality of Connecticut once Turi, Molly, and Arnulfo arrive in New England. What do you think the author is saying about what prompts imagination and action? What do you think the author is also saying about Turi's **American Dream versus his American Reality**? How can the novel be read as the practical, even dangerous struggle to achieve the American Dream? Do you have a different appreciation for an achievement when it is only a dream than after you have struggled to attain that achievement?

*2. Describe **the different roles that book reading and wordplay have in the novel** with different characters. How does the love of reading give Turi a different view of his self and who he could be? How does the love of wordplay connect Turi and Molly in a special way that leads to their friendship? How does meeting another reader mean that somehow you trust that person a bit more than if he/she wasn't a reader? Why? Describe Cosio Torgenson's reaction when he finds out Turi and Molly are young readers.

*3. How is **Arnulfo's American Dream** different from Turi's? Why? How do these different American Dreams cause conflict and danger for them? How does it cause them to react to certain situations differently?

*4. How is **Turi's character inventive, resourceful, and alert** in ways that are different from the other main characters, Molly and Arnulfo? Is Turi a natural leader? What does it take to be a leader in a group? How do you gain the trust of those around you? Describe how Turi demonstrates these qualities throughout the novel.

5. What is going on between **Chucho and Eduardo** as they search for Turi and Arnulfo? What is their relationship, what does Chucho want their relationship to be, and what is Eduardo's identity (or at least the identity that Chucho thinks Eduardo hides to himself)?

*6. How does the reader get a sense of **Turi's morality** through his subtle actions? What are his moral values, if you had to describe them? Does he like to steal? Does he obey authority? Does he follow his worst impulses? Is he brave? How does he treat women? Where do you think Turi gets his moral compass from?

*7. Describe **the role of storytelling** in the novel. For example, what does the recounting of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* do for Turi and Arnulfo when they are hiding from the narcos in the Mark Twain National Forest? What does Turi telling stories about his abuelita, Doña Dolores Rivero, do for Molly when they are facing the pandemic toward the end of the novel? How does storytelling help to calm you as well as help to give you hope in a difficult situation?

*8. Describe **how Turi sees himself** and how he first sees Molly in the tackle shop in Steepleville. Why do you think Turi suddenly sees himself as "dark-skinned" outside of El Paso? How does he first see blond, blue-eyed Molly? How does this awe of Molly change over time? Why? What helps both to go beyond their preconceptions of each other?

*9. Describe **Turi's views of women** throughout the novel. How do these views evolve over time? Start from the woman with the big butt in the magazine page on Turi's wheelbarrow; to his dreams about the librarian Mrs. Garcia; to his relationship with Molly. How is the author showing the progression from the awkward romantic ideals of a young boy to the practical reality of how Turi appreciates his friend Molly? How does Turi mature as an adult?

*10. Describe **the different moments of racism** that Turi and Arnulfo face throughout the novel. With Mike (who fixes their truck) at the Mark Twain National Forest. With the couple in Danbury, Connecticut at the McDonald's. Do you think there is more racism in places without many Mexicans or Mexican Americans when strangers meet people like Turi and Arnulfo? How do the main characters, including Molly, react differently to this racism? Why?

*11. Why do you think Molly decides to join Turi and Arnulfo? How has she come to trust them so quickly? How is this related to how Turi and Arnulfo meet at the chicken farm in Ysleta and Turi decides to join him in the blue Ford pickup on the fly? Why is it that some **young people have this trusting nature**, especially when meeting new friends? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having this immediately trusting nature?

*12. What is **Arnulfo's view of Molly** and how is it different from Turi's? Does Arnulfo have a more patriarchal view of women? If so, why? Give examples.

*13. Describe **Don Ilan's view of human nature**. How does he classify people? Who are Wild Beasts and who are Pretenders? What is a Quest? What is it to wear a mask, metaphorically speaking, according to Don Ilan? What do you think of his view of human nature? Is he right?

*14. Why do you think Molly's brother, Jim, hates Mexicans? What could lead two family members (Molly and Jim) to have very **different views of immigrants**? What has influenced Jim to have his xenophobic views? Describe Jim's and Molly's contrasting views about how the world works.

*15. Why do you think the author makes the drug distributor John Broaddus Dunbar a blue-eyed, Anglo businessman whose ancestors fought at the Alamo? How is he **the opposite of a stereotypical Mexican 'drug lord'**? Do you think the author is making a point about who has often profited from connections with Mexico in the drug trade?

*16. Have you ever experienced **the gap in self-perception versus social perception** described by Turi (167-168), when "who he thinks he is in his mind is sometimes not who others see or imagine he can be"? How and why does this happen? How is this related to racism, or relying on stereotypes to judge someone? What does it take to get to know the 'real person' when you meet a stranger?

*17. Why is it **significant for their relationship that Turi reaches to hold Molly's hand without fear** when he hears what El Hijo de Huerta did to Molly's brother? What do you think Turi had to overcome to take this important step with Molly?

18. How did the **Marburg-B** virus get exposed (and into Chucho's blood stream) when they were retrieving the blood vials from the blue Ford pickup in the impound lot in Torrington, Connecticut?

*19. What do you think of **Rudy's philosophy of how America works**, how former immigrants should help newer immigrants to become part of this country? What do you think of this philosophy of 'paying it forward' with generosity toward others, especially new immigrants? How does this philosophy help to build a community? Why do you think that some fight against helping newer immigrants?

*20. Toward the end of *Nobody's Pilgrims* (pages 234-235), how does the author communicate that **Molly and Turi can see each other in the dark, their true selves**, and why does this matter? Is the author criticizing those who only 'see' superficially? How must Turi overcome his own self-conception (stupid, chubby, Mexican kid with bruises on his body) before he can find love? Why do you think Molly allows Turi to touch her?

21. Why do you think **El Hijo de Huerta attacks Oscar** instead of Turi? Is El Hijo surprised by Turi's appearance (the same polo shirt as Oscar's)?

Topics in *Nobody's Pilgrims* (with page numbers)

Turi's idealism of Connecticut, New England, 1-2

Book reading and imagination, 1-2

Turi's dreams, 2, 6-7

Turi's inventiveness and artwork, 7

Turi's mother (Estela) is a reader, 10, 51

Arnulfo worries about the migra, 16-17

Arnulfo's American Dream, 18, 63

 Arnulfo's American Dream of work, "You think they would hire me?" 181

Turi's mother as his moral compass, 25

 The limits of his mother as a moral compass, 26

Turi's alertness, 30-31

Turi's initiatives in action, 36-37, 38, 74

Incongruity between Dunbar's blue eyes and his Spanish, 40

Gatingo, 49-50

Chucho and Eduardo's relationship, 55-56

Ratcheting up the terms of the lost truck (for Juanito, for Dunbar), 59

Turi's moral values, 63, 68-69

 Turi stops for the patrol car, 172

 Turi obeys the police officer to return to the ICE booth, 215

 Turi after Juanito attacks him: "I don't like lying to them." 248, 252

Turi suddenly sees himself as "dark-skinned" in the tackle shop, 67

Turi's decision to stop at the Mark Twain National Forest (reading as a catalyst for action), 70

Turi's retelling *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to Arnulfo in the forest, 72-73

Turi's curiosity about the 'drugs' in the truck, 77

Turi in awe of Molly, 79-80

Mike's racism when fixing the blue Ford pickup, 81

Turi's connection with Mrs. Garcia and Molly, 85

Turi and Molly's wordplay, 87

 Wordplay with 'perros' and 'pero,' 171

 Word games in the dark between Molly and Turi, 234

Molly decides to join them, 89

Turi invites Molly to join them, 91

Arnulfo's reaction, view of women and Molly, 92-93

Don Ilan's view of human nature, 99, 100

El Tapado, top customer of Don Ilan (producer) and Dunbar (distributor), 102-3

Marburg-B virus, 103-4

Molly suspicious the truck doesn't belong to Turi and Arnulfo, 106-107

Turi and Molly's connection with *Huckleberry Finn*, 107

Molly steps out of the truck at night to talk to Turi at Salt Fork State Park in Ohio, 110

Molly asks about Mrs. Garcia, 111

Turi encourages Molly to tell her brother about where she is, 112-113, 115

Molly's American Dream, 115-117

Jim (Molly's brother) hates Mexicans and immigrants, 118-119, 120

Jim's and Molly's contrasting views about how the world works, 122

El Hijo de Huerta, 123-127

Molly sees Turi as the "nicest, most intelligent boy I've ever met in my life," 133

Arnulfo's attitude toward women, 135, 136, 138, 141

Turi's contrition for lying to Molly, 136, 138, 139

Manuel Aguirre runs over El Hijo de Huerta, 151

Don Ilan and El Tapado, 155

El Hijo de Huerta as Wild Beast, 156

John Broaddus Dunbar as an Anglo, blue-eyed businessman with ancestors at the Alamo, 161

Turi mentions to Molly that his Connecticut means 'Charlie Brown' specials, leaves in the fall, pumpkins, 163-164

Racist man at McDonald's confronts Turi, Arnulfo, and Molly, 168

Turi's "gap," when "who he thinks he is in his mind is sometimes not who others see or imagine he can be," 167-168

The Mystery of the Mighty Housatonic River, 2-3, 170

Molly's open to romantic possibilities with Turi, 176

Turi reaches to hold Molly's hand without fear when he hears what happened to her brother, 178-180, 182-183

One barb pierces Chucho's glove, 195

Eduardo flings the plastic bag of tools and vials to the top of the fence, 198

Marburg-B virus exposed (and in Chucho's blood stream) in the impound lot, 198, 200, 204

Chucho reaches to get the vials (one already broken), 199

El Tapado, 201-203

Rudy's philosophy of how America works, how immigrants help each other, 221-222

Juanito's idea for redeeming himself in Dunbar's eyes, 229-230

Turi and Molly touching each other in the darkness, 235

Turi's self-conception (stupid, chubby, Mexican kid with bruises on his body) and love, 235

Cosio exclaims, "We have readers here!" 239

New York apocalypse, 240

Don Ilan goes after Dunbar, 256

El Hijo attacks Oscar (instead of Turi), 261

Molly's depression, 264-265

Turi's way of fighting back, 265

Turi tells Molly's stories (about his grandmother) and keeps them working to avoid despair, 268-269, 270, 273