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# CULTURAL IDENTITY, FAMILY HISTORY, AND GRITO IN *MEXIKID: A GRAPHIC MEMOIR*

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## Abstract

The author reviews multi-award-winning YA graphic memoir *Mexikid: A Graphic Memoir* (2023) by Pedro Martín, providing a summary, essential questions, and teaching ideas.

**Keywords:** YA graphic memoir, Pedro Martín, *Mexikid: A Graphic Memoir*, Mexican-American identities, Mexican culture, Mexican history, multilingual storytelling, multimodal text

Pedro Martín is the seventh of nine kids in his Mexican-American family, and in 1977, his parents decided the family would take a road trip to Jalisco, Mexico, to bring Pedro's abuelito to the United States. Winner of the 2024 Pura Belpré Award (Author & Illustrator), Eisner Award, and Newbery Honor, *Mexikid: A Graphic Memoir* is the story of that adventure.

With the parents and the younger kids in the Winnebago Chieftan (delightfully illustrated and annotated on pp. 38-39) and the older kids driving the family pick-up truck (customized with a homemade wooden bench seat with ropes for seatbelts, p. 40), the Martín family makes the 2,000-mile journey. Along the way, Pedro and his siblings entertain themselves with unregulated Mexican toys and homemade audio recordings of Fleetwood Mac, *Happy Days*, and "Shipooi?" from *The Music Man*. Pedro also learns about his abuelito's heroism during the Mexican Revolution and his own apa's childhood, including the early deaths of his mom and four of his brothers. He finds out that Abuelito won't leave Mexico until Abuelita's remains are safely reburied in a new location (away from the underground river that has shifted course and is threatening the town cemetery). And Pedro finds his grito!

*Mexikid* will appeal to a variety of readers from early adolescence through adulthood: readers interested in exploring Mexican geography, culture, and history and bilingual storytelling; readers who want a (mostly) lighthearted tale that explores serious themes with tenderness and poignancy, while also eliciting uproarious laughter; readers who enjoy eye-catching art and design elements in graphic texts; and readers who want to appreciate the power and joy of recollecting indelible moments and iconic pop culture from childhood.

This would be an excellent text for educators to include in their English language arts, world languages/cultures, and/or social studies curriculums, and it might inspire inquiry related to the following essential questions (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005):

1. How does/will it feel to say goodbye to home? When have you had to say goodbye to home (or when will you)?
2. When did/will you cross the border from childhood to adulthood? What does it mean to grow up and be responsible for your loved ones?
3. How does one honor all their intersecting identities, cultures, and/or traditions?

4. Is it possible to find humor in times of grief, pain, or uncertainty? If so, *should* we? Additionally, educators may be interested in including the following learning activities/assessments in their curriculum planning around *Mexikid*:

1. **Analyze design elements in graphic texts:** Select a 2 to 4-page passage from the book, or a vignette from <https://www.mexikid.com/>. Analyze Martín’s use of design elements (linguistic, visual, gestural, spatial, auditory) in the text. What messages does each mode convey? What inferences can you draw, and what evidence supports the meaning you construct?
2. **Geography/Social Studies connections:** Track the Martín family trip from California to Jalisco, Mexico, and back to Watsonville, California (they take two different routes). What sights would they see along the way? How does their experience crossing the border compare to/contrast with how U.S. citizens cross the border today?
3. **Compose from Personal Experience:** Martín writes in detail about his family and his experiences on this road trip, often depicting popular culture that defined his childhood.
  - a. Using Martín’s text as a mentor text (particularly pp. 1-10), depict yourself and/or the important people in your life (family, friends, loved ones) using both print and nonprint text. Sketch ideas in your writer’s notebook.
  - b. What elements of popular culture were/are indelible in your childhood? What stories could you tell about them? Brainstorm ideas in your writer’s notebook.
4. **Heroes and Fools:** Martín has stated that “the best stories rely heavily on abandoning your ego in service of the story” (Schwartz, 2024). The stories in which we are foolish, rather than heroes, might be the more interesting tales. Brainstorm stories from your childhood in which you felt foolish or humiliated. Choose one story to write about in your writer’s notebook. Reflect: how does your telling of this story now shift how you perceive your role in it and/or what you learned from it?

Pedro Martín describes his memoir *Mexikid* as “a story about cultural identity, family history, and maturity (but also thick boogers, sudden diarrhea, and live deer surgery)” (Schwartz, 2024). It is enlightening, tender, and hilarious—and I highly recommend it!

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### Author Biography

Katherine (Katie) Mason Cramer, Ph.D. (she/her) is in her 17<sup>th</sup> year as Program Chair and Professor of English Education in Wichita State University’s School of Education. Prior to earning her doctorate, Katie was a middle school English teacher in Kansas City, Kansas, Public Schools. She has been a member of KATE and on the Executive Board since moving back to Kansas (from Arizona and Georgia) in 2010, and she has served as Editor of *Kansas English* since 2017. Under her

leadership, *Kansas English* has been honored with NCTE's Affiliate Journal of Excellence Award in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025. Katie's research and publications center the use of young adult literature to recognize, affirm, and teach diverse genders and sexualities in ELA classrooms and curricula. She can be reached at [Katie.Cramer@wichita.edu](mailto:Katie.Cramer@wichita.edu).



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