



RICK RIORDAN PRESENTS

SAL & GABI BREAK THE UNIVERSE

This guide is aligned with the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (CCR) for Literature, Writing, Language, and Speaking and Listening. The broad CCR standards are the foundation for the grade level-specific Common Core State Standards.

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Disney • Hyperion

ABOUT THE BOOK

It all starts with a raw chicken in a locker.

When Sal Vidón avoids a beating from school bully Yasmany by reaching into another dimension and pulling out a raw chicken, he assumes he'll be able to explain away his actions with a magician's sleight of hand.

Enter Gabi Reál, editor of the school newspaper and student council president. She's determined to defend her friend Yasmany and prove Sal planted the poultry in Yasmany's locker, even though the raw chicken has since mysteriously disappeared.

Although the entire school thinks Sal is a brujo, Gabi's sharp investigative skills prove Sal's expert magic tricks come from something far from witchcraft. He's able to pull things from other dimensions and bring them into his own, including his dead mother. When Sal's ability to manipulate the universe doesn't faze Gabi, he knows he's found a friend, or at least someone he can work with. After all, Gabi is dealing with her own set of problems, including a younger brother clinging to life in the NICU.

Fueled with bellies of Cuban food and aided by a sharp-tongued entropy sweeper, Sal and Gabi attempt to mend the dimension rifts created by Sal's magic tricks and solve their problems, hoping they don't end the universe in the process.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Type 1 Diabetes

Sal Vidón, the main character of *Sal and Gabi Break the Universe*, has type 1 diabetes, a chronic condition that affects the way the body processes glucose, a type of sugar. In the body, the food we eat is broken down into a variety of nutrients, including glucose, which the body uses for energy. However, the body needs insulin, a hormone, to transfer the glucose it makes from the bloodstream to the cells of the body, where it can be used as fuel. For people with type 1 diabetes, the body does not produce enough insulin, which means blood glucose, or blood sugar, cannot be regulated, as it is in the bodies of people without diabetes.

As a result, people with type 1 diabetes need to regularly check their blood sugar levels, and use insulin therapy to make sure cells receive the proper amount of glucose. People diagnosed with type 1 diabetes can learn to manage their condition, and live long, healthy lives. However, unregulated diabetes can lead to serious health problems, including blindness, nerve damage, and death. To learn more about diabetes, visit the American Diabetes Association's website at www.diabetes.org.

Parallel Universes

Sal's ability to reach into other dimensions illustrates the theory of parallel universes. This theory suggests that alternate universes exist parallel to our own and that decisions made in these universes change their features and characteristics. This idea is popular in comic books, video games, and movies.

Miami, Florida

The book is set in Miami, Florida. Miami is a large, diverse city on the southern tip of Florida. Cuban American culture forms a large part of the city's identity, owing to the city's proximity to the island of Cuba, which lies a mere 90 miles off the coast. From food like ropa vieja and frijoles negros, to the music of bachata and salsa, to daily activities including playing dominos, many of Miami's popular characteristics are remnants of Cuba brought to the city by political exiles.

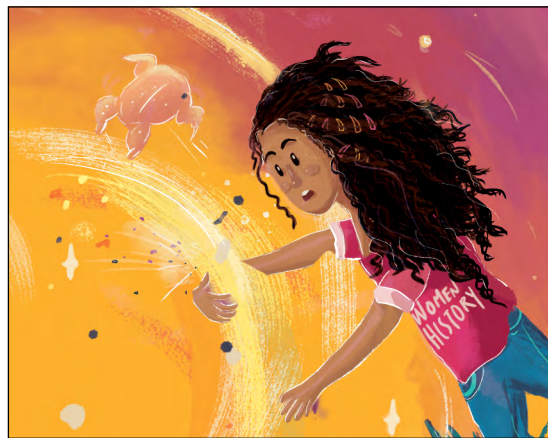
PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Sal and Gabi Break the Universe begins with the following lines:

"There's all sorts of bad advice out there about how to deal with bullies. *Ignore them. Stand up to them. Tell a teacher, tell a parent, tell your dentist while he's sticking your teeth back into your face.* The real way to deal with a bully is to stick a raw chicken in their locker."

- 1 These lines are spoken by Sal Vidón, the narrator of the book. Based on what Sal says, what kind of person do you think he is? What kind of personality do you think he has?
- 2 Sal offers advice on how to deal with bullies. Do you agree with his advice? What do you think are the best ways to handle bullies?

R.CCR.1, R.CCR.4, R.CCR.6



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For each response, use at least one piece of textual evidence to support your answer.

- 1 In the first chapter, Yasmany insults Sal by telling him, “Just come back from safari, white boy? I mean, if you even are a boy.” What do we learn about Sal based on this statement?
- 2 In the beginning of the book, we read that Sal has type 1 diabetes. What do we learn about how Sal manages his diabetes? How might this affect his school day?
- 3 In chapter 3, we meet Gabi Reál. Based on her behavior in the principal’s office, what assumptions can we make about her character?
- 4 In the beginning of chapter 4, Sal explains that a giant helped him. Who do you think the giant is and how did it help Sal?
- 5 Sal says that questions can’t be lies. Do you agree with his statement? How does Sal use this to his advantage during the lie detector test?
- 6 In chapter 6, Sal thinks, “Gabi, man. That girl was nothing but trouble.” Why would Sal think this about Gabi and not Yasmany?
- 7 Sal can reach into other dimensions in order to do tricks. Why do you think he’s training to be a legitimate magician when he could simply do magic tricks that way?
- 8 Instead of sending him to detention for misbehaving, Sal’s PE teacher says, “You’re going places! Because being a diabetic will never get in the way of your dreams!” Do you think we treat people who are facing challenges differently? What do you think Sal’s PE teacher should have done?
- 9 Why are Sal and Gabi antagonists at first? What is the turning point in their relationship?
- 10 Why does Sal keep pulling things from other dimensions if he knows the damage it causes?
- 11 Each time Sal pulls his Mami Muerta from another dimension, she’s slightly different. Do you think these versions of his mom are still his mom?
- 12 If Papi really builds the remembrance machine, how will that affect Sal’s ability to pull things from other dimensions? Do you think Sal really wants the machine to work?
- 13 When Sal meets all of Gabi’s dads, he says that’s the moment she became his friend for real. Why do you think it’s this event that makes them friends?
- 14 Sal meets Gabi’s little brother, Iggy, in the neonatal intensive care unit. What things do Sal and Iggy have in common?
- 15 Read over the article Gabi wrote about Sal for the *Rotten Egg* newspaper. Why would Sal view the article negatively and Gabi view the same article positively?
- 16 At the beginning of chapter 23, Sal describes all the things he’s learning in school. He says his classes give him the same sense of wonder he gets from peeking into alternate realities. Do you think his comparison is accurate?
- 17 When the PE teacher changes the climbing wall so that it can be easily conquered, the students are upset. Why do you think this is, even though they’d all been frustrated in the past at not being able to get to the top?
- 18 Spanish is frequently used in conversation in *Sal and Gabi Break the Universe*. Sometimes Sal explains what is being said and sometimes

he doesn't. Read the conversation between Principal Torres and Sal on page 275. What do you think *travesuras* means? What clues in their conversation help you understand the meaning of the word?

- 19** Sal never asks Yasmany what happened to him. What do you think happened? What clues from the story support your opinion?
- 20** Sal and Gabi perform their play about death in the cafeteria of the hospital. How does the play connect to the themes of the entire book?
- 21** Carlos Hernandez, the author of *Sal and Gabi Break the Universe*, is writing a sequel to the book. What problems do you think Sal and Gabi will face in the next book based on how the story ends?
- R.CCR.1, R.CCR.2, R.CCR.3, R.CCR.4, R.CCR.8*

EXTENSION RESPONSES

Select one quote from *Sal and Gabi Break the Universe* from the list below. 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** “Fear is your body trying to tell your brain what to do. But the brain is the king of the body. It calls the shots.” (p. 4)
- 2** “Gabi, I was noticing, was a very forgiving person. I’ve noticed sometimes smart people aren’t. They’re more interested in being right, being on top, and they think that means crushing the competition with their huge

brains. But Gabi didn’t need to put others down to raise herself up.” (p. 187)

- 3** “I love it when adults remember to behave themselves. They forget all the time, you know. Hard to blame them, though. They haven’t been kids for a long while.” (p. 289)
- 4** “Sometimes, when it’s too hard, when it hurts too much, only silliness can save us.” (p. 310)
- W.CCR.1, W.CCR.2, W.CCR.4, W.CCR.5*

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

- 1** Design your own parallel universe. What would be different and why? *W.CCR.1, W.CCR.4*
- 2** Select one historical event and change the outcome. How would this difference, should it occur in a parallel universe, affect the features and characteristics of that universe? How would this universe differ from our own? *W.CCR.3, W.CCR.4*

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

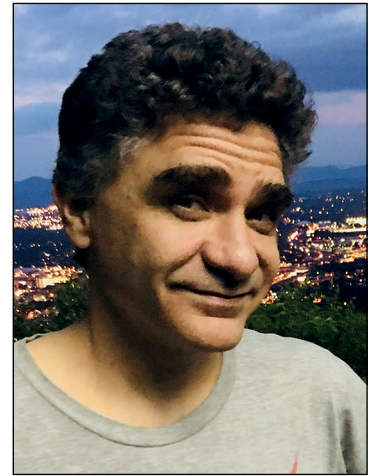
- 1** Have students read the Space.com article on parallel universes (*Online Resources/Further Reading*). Each student should select a side, in favor of or against the existence of parallel universes. Guide the students in a debate and have each side come up with additional supports for their chosen side. *R.CCR.8, SL.CCR.1*
- 2** Challenge students to learn a magic trick and present it to the class. Alternatively, students can study a magic trick and describe how it’s done. *W.CCR.2, W.CCR.8, SL.CCR.4*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carlos Hernandez drew on his Cuban American background, as well as his love of sci-fi, to write this story. He is also the author of more than thirty works of fiction, poetry, and drama, most notably a book of short stories for adults entitled *The Assimilated Cuban's Guide to Quantum Santeria*.

He is an English professor at City University of New York, and he loves to both play games as well as design them. He lives with his wife, Claire, in Queens, New York. Follow him on Twitter @WriteTeachPlay.



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Q & A WITH THE AUTHOR

Q: *Sal and Gabi Break the Universe* is part of Rick Riordan Presents. What was it like working with a reader favorite like Rick Riordan? What was it like as an author to make the switch from adult fiction to middle grade fiction?

A: Working with Rick has been an absolute career highlight. I read the first Percy Jackson books years ago and loved them. To be asked to be an author for Rick Riordan Presents? A dream come true.

Rick, in person, is every bit as wonderful as you think he is, based on his fiction. He is so smart, and so quick and funny, so gentle and curious and human, and did I say smart? He is so very brilliant. Isn't it nice when idols live up to the hype?

Making the switch from writing for adults versus writing for kids means, in a very real sense, upping my game as a writer. Kids are smart; you have to write books worthy of their intelligence. But kids unapologetically want to be entertained: as well they should! Making sure I'm both honoring how smart kids are and how hungry for a good story they are has made my writing clearer, punchier, and I hope more delightful. I'm going to take those lessons with me when I next write for adults!

Q: What aspects of Cuban culture were you most eager to share with readers?

A: Time and again, when I have spoken to anybody who has spent any time in either Cuba or Miami—native Cubans, tourists, anybody—they have commented on the vibrancy of the Cuban spirit, the lust for life that they see, even (in the case of Cuba) of the abject poverty that casts a pall over every aspect of daily life. That joy in the midst of tragedy is a gift that Cuba has given to world culture. In my small way, I wanted to capture some bit of the courageous verve and brio that I have known all my life through my family and friends of Cuban descent. It's life-saving stuff.

Q: What's been the most exciting part of bringing *Sal and Gabi Break the Universe* to young readers? Have there been any challenges?

A: My goal as a writer is to give readers a few thoughts that maybe they haven't thought about before, a few images they maybe haven't encountered before. The most exciting part of writing *Sal and Gabi* was to give young readers food for their imaginations, through the lens of a main character who is relatable and unique at the same time.

Challenges? Countless challenges. Writing a novel is hard! Luckily, I had a lot of people who helped me. Please read the acknowledgments at the end of the book! I am so grateful so many people helped me write this novel.

Q: Are the characters in *Sal and Gabi Break the Universe* similar to you in any way?

A: Sal makes mistakes in very similar ways to how I do: unintentionally, often when I think I am doing a good thing, and often with hilarious unforeseen consequences. Granted, I've never broken the universe, but that's probably only because I can't!

Gabi, on the other hand, is much more aspirational, much more like someone I'd like to be. She is smart, ferocious, heroic, and for all that, forgiving, and an optimist. She makes her share of mistakes, too, but that's because she's human. When she does make mistakes, she owns up, and pledges to change to be better. Writing a character like her has helped me to clarify the kind of person I want to be.

Q: *Sal and Gabi Break the Universe* is not only a sci-fi adventure story but also one that has strong themes surrounding family. Why was it important to you to write about families in all their different shapes and forms?

A: Finally, now, in the twenty-first century, we are beginning to honor all the varieties of families that exist. Biological family is tremendously important, but it's only the beginning of how great family can be. The family we choose is just as important to help us grow and become the people we want to become.

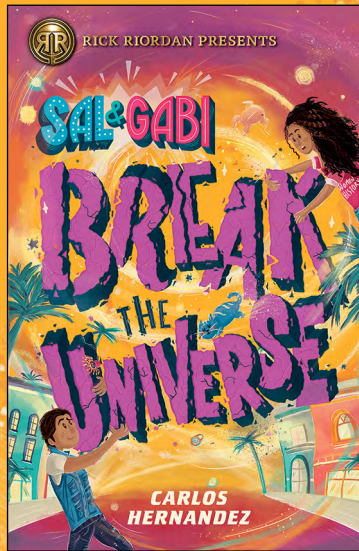
Love is love is love. Expanding our definition of family expands our capacity to love. Every human in the universe should have expanding their definition of love as a primary goal.

ONLINE RESOURCES/FURTHER READING

- Bracci, Jennifer and Angie Jones. *Waiting for Baby: A Sibling Visits the NICU*. Balboa Press, 2012.
- Creamer, Colleen. "In Miami, Cuban Culture, No Passport Required." *The New York Times*, April 7, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/travel/little-havana-calle-ocho-miami.html>.
- Howell, Elizabeth. "Parallel Universes: Theories and Evidence." *Space.com*, May 10, 2018, <https://www.space.com/32728-parallel-universes.html>.
- Type 1 Diabetes. <http://www.diabetes.org/diabetes-basics/type-1/> Accessed 21 January 2019.

This guide was created by Adrianna Cuevas, a Cuban American author. Ms. Cuevas holds a master's degree in English, specializing in English for Speakers of Other Languages.

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