

A Reading Guide to



*The Smell of Old
Lady Perfume*

by

Claudia Guadalupe Martinez

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Summary: Discusses the writing, characters, plot, and themes of this 2008 Award-winning book. Includes lesson questions and activities.

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Introduction:

Authors are people just like your friends, your family, and you. Sometimes they write about the places they live, the people they know, and the things they experience. Other times they make up the characters and events in their stories. Many times they do both in the same story: They get ideas from the people they know, the things they have done, and the places they have been, and they use those ideas to create a story.

Authors enjoy meeting and talking to the people who read their books. You will be reading the book *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume*. You will then have the opportunity to meet the author of the book, Claudia Guadalupe Martinez. You can ask her questions about her life, her book, and what it is like to be an author.

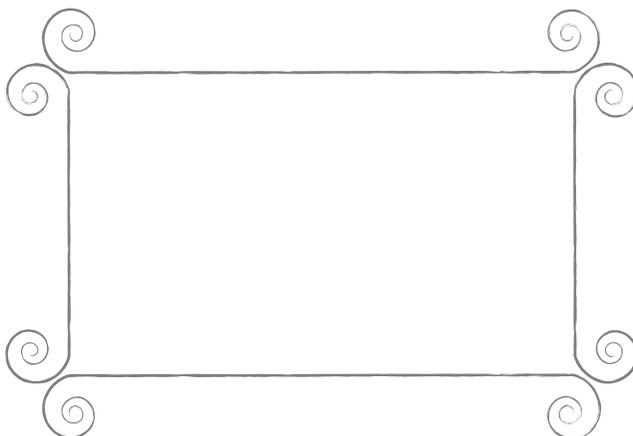
Anyone who wants to write stories and share them with other people can be an author. In addition to reading *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume*, you will also have the opportunity to write your own story!

Lesson One: *Who is Claudia Guadalupe Martinez?*

What are three words you can use to describe authors?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Draw a picture of an author.



Have you ever met an author? Who was it?

What was it like to meet an author?

Read this description of *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume*:

Chela Gonzalez, the book's narrator, is an eleven year old nerd and soccer player who can barely contain her excitement about starting the sixth grade in her El Paso, TX school. But nothing is as she imagined—her best friend turns on her to join the popular girls and they all act like Chela doesn't exist. She buries herself in schoolwork and in the warm comfort of her family. To Chela, her family is like a solar system, with her father the sun and her mother, brothers, and sister like planets rotating all around him. It's a small world, but it's the only one she fits in.

Who is the main character in the book?

What do you know about the main character?

What is the setting of the book?

Write a summary of what you think the book will be about.

Read the following information about the author of *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume*:

*Claudia Guadalupe Martinez grew up in El Paso, Texas where she learned that letters form words from reading the subtitles of old Westerns for her father. He encouraged her to write a book or two someday. While he died when she was eleven, she wrote *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume* in his memory. Claudia now lives and writes in Chicago, IL.*

Write three things you know about the author after reading the biography:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Use the following websites and/or do your own research to learn more about Claudia Guadalupe Martinez:

Publisher's site: http://www.cincopuntos.com/authors_detail.sstg?id=88

Author pages: <http://www.claudiaguadalupemartinez.com>

Author interview: <http://cynthialeitichsmith.blogspot.com/2010/01/craft-career-cheer-claudia-guadalupe.html>

Write down five facts that you learned about Claudia Guadalupe Martinez:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

Write your own biography of the author, using information from at least three of the sources you read about her.

In a few weeks, you will have the chance to meet Claudia Guadalupe Martinez. What is one question you would like to ask if you met her today?

Lesson Two: *All about El Paso*

What do you know about Texas?

Watch the video One Square Mile Texas (<http://video.pbs.org/video/2365156846/>) about El Paso, Texas, where the author grew up and the setting of *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume*. What do you think El Paso, Texas is like after watching the video?

With the help of your teacher, look up photos of El Paso. What words would you use to describe the places you see in these photos?

What words would you use to describe the place where you live?

Find a place in the book (for example: pg. 88 or pg. 178) where Claudia describes Chela's home or her city. What words does she use to describe them?

Complete the chart to compare and contrast your hometown and El Paso.

	El Paso	My Hometown
Compare (How are my hometown and El Paso alike?)		
Contrast (How are my hometown and El Paso different?)		

Use the information in your chart to write a paragraph that describes where you live to someone who has never been there before.

Lesson 3: *Introducing Chela*

Chapters One and Two of *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume* introduce us to Chela, the main character of the book.

List three adjectives to describe Chela after reading Chapters One and Two. Fill out the chart with words from the text and a page number that support why you chose each adjective.

My adjective	Quote from the book	Page #

What do you think is important to Chela at the beginning of the book?

What does Chela worry about at the beginning of the book?

Chela's Timeline

Many important things happen to Chela during her 6th grade year. Each of these things change her: They change what she worries about and what is important to her. As you read the book, choose six important events with a page number and write them on the timeline. On the other side of the line, write how the event changes or affects Chela. See example below:

EVENT	CHANGE
Chela's best friend Nora unfriends her to become a popular girl. (pg. 74)	Chela becomes a loner who walks home and eats lunch alone. (pgs. 77-82)

List three words to describe Chela after reading the book:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

What do you think is important to Chela at the end of the book?

What does Chela worry about at the end of the book?

Lesson 4: *My Own Story*

Authors don't always write about exciting or unusual events. Some of the best authors write about the ordinary, everyday events that happen in our lives. Claudia Guadalupe Martinez writes about one year in the life of Chela. During that year, many things happen to Chela that happen to many other 6th graders: someone she loves dies; she loses a friend; she wins an award.

Anyone who writes a story to share with other people is an author. You will now write a story like those Claudia Guadalupe Martinez writes about Chela. You will choose a setting for your story and a character to write about. You will think of an event that will change how your character thinks or feels, and write a story about the event and that change.

Authors want their readers to believe their characters are like the real people they know. Sometimes people say that a character in a book is believable if that character seems very real. To make their characters seem believable, authors help their readers understand what the characters think, feel, and care about. Authors call this developing a character. As you write your story, you will think about developing your main character. One way to do this is to think about how the things that happen in your story change your character. Making a timeline to show how events in your story affect your character can help with this.

The setting for *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume* is El Paso, Texas. Much of the story happens in Chela's home and in her school. Where will your story be set?

Write three sentences that help your reader understand what it is like in that place you chose for your setting:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

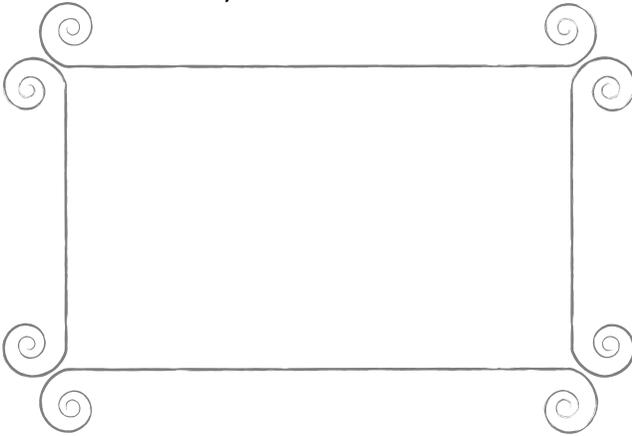
Who is the narrator or main character of your story?

What is his or her name?

How old is he or she?

What does he or she look like?

Draw a portrait of the character.



List three adjectives that describe your main character:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

At the beginning of the book, Chela is excited about starting 6th grade and spending time with her best friend, Nora. She loves her family and loves soccer. At the beginning of your story, what are the most important things in your main character's life?

The Smell of Old Lady Perfume has many important characters in addition to Chela: Apa, Silvia, Nora, Camila. What other characters will be important in your story?

Character Timeline

We have talked about the events that happen in the book that change Chela. What are some things that will happen in your story to change your character? Complete the timeline for your character:

EVENT	CHANGE
	

Lesson 5: *Meeting Claudia Guadalupe Martinez*

Most of the time when we read a book, we don't have the chance to talk to the author. But you will have the chance to meet Claudia Guadalupe Martinez and ask her questions about her life, her book, and being an author. To help you prepare for this meeting, you will create a set of questions. You will work with a partner or your teacher to revise your questions. When you have written good questions, you will practice asking them.

Use the chart on the next page to evaluate your questions. After getting feedback from your teacher and your classmates, make revisions to your questions. Write down your final questions here:

1) Question about the book:

2) Question about the author's life:

3) Question about writing:

4) Other question:

Write questions you would like ask the author below.	Evaluate your question below and ask your classmates or teacher to evaluate your question to the right.	Do I understand what the question means?	Are there mistakes that need to be corrected?	Is the question interesting to other students?
Question about the book:	Is the question about the book?			
Question about her life:	Is the question about the author's life?			
Question about writing:	Is the question about writing?			
Another question you would like to ask (about anything):				



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