

THE  
BOOKS OF

MATT  
DE LA  
PEÑA

READERS  
GUIDE



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ABOUT THE BOOKS OF

# MATT DE LA PEÑA

Photo by Caroline Sun



**M**att de la Peña touches the lives of teen readers by allowing them to see a piece of themselves or someone they know in the true-to-life characters. He continues to grow as a writer with each novel, and his career will surely be long and full of characters readers will love.

De la Peña's main characters are boys who are disenfranchised, alone, and trying to overcome their pasts. Lacking traditional support systems, they face situations that are out of their control. In *Ball Don't Lie*, seventeen-year-old Sticky has been in and out of foster homes all of his life. In *Mexican WhiteBoy*, Danny, who is a biracial teen with an absent father, doesn't fit in with his Mexican family or at his all-white private school. In *We Were Here*, Miguel is sent to live in a group home after accidentally killing his older brother. And in de la Peña's newest novel, *I Will Save You*, Kidd, who has multiple personalities, attempts to kill himself on several occasions.

De la Peña offers hope to those readers who live in seemingly hopeless situations; he offers a glimpse of what could be if they, like his characters, have the courage to move beyond the situations that have previously defined them. Willing to take the risks, Sticky plays basketball every day for hours until he is accepted to play on the A-teams. And Miguel runs away from the group home with two kids as messed up as he is, but more importantly returns to complete his time.

Along the way, each character discovers help and support in unexpected places. Friends and family come to their aid, and each character finds they can give back the same support and help that is given to them. Mr. Red helps Kidd by giving him a job, and Kidd saves his life. And Danny's family shows him the love and support he needs to accept who he is and what he can do.

While de la Peña's books do not have storybook endings, his characters become mature, responsible young men who can be proud of their accomplishments and the steps they took to achieve them.



# I WILL SAVE YOU

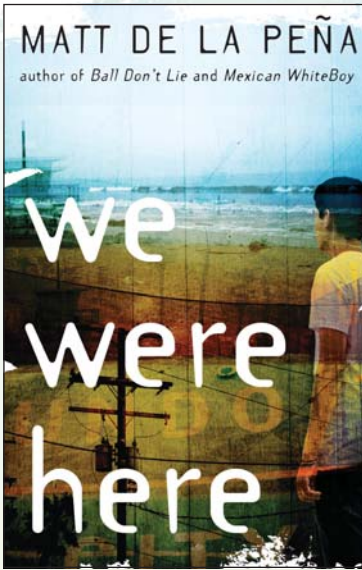
## A HAUNTING EXPLORATION OF IDENTITY, LOVE, AND THE MEANING OF FRIENDSHIP.

NEW!

Grades 9 up  
HC: 978-0-385-73827-9  
GLB: 978-0-385-90719-4

### Discussion Questions

- Kidd's father left him when he was nine and his mother died when he was ten. How does Kidd's heritage affect the decisions he makes? What role do Kidd's parents play in his confusion about who he really is?
- Why does Kidd's counselor advise him to break all ties with Devon? Why does Devon show up again after Kidd has seemingly broken free of him? How does Kidd repeatedly try to free himself of Devon?
- What role does Mr. Red play in Kidd's life? If Mr. Red had been aware of Kidd's entanglement with Devon, how would he have handled Kidd coming to him for work? How do Kidd and Mr. Red save each other?
- How does Olivia and Kidd's relationship help each of them become better people? In what ways do each of them change for the better? How do Olivia and Kidd save each other?
- When Kidd meets Maria at dinner, he tells her he is scared; he knows he is going to mess everything up. What, if anything, could Maria have said that might have prevented Kidd from trying to commit suicide? Does Kidd believe he was trying to commit suicide? What does he believe?
- When Kidd finds Mr. Red drunk, Kidd wants to tell him about Devon stalking and threatening Olivia. If Mr. Red would have been sober, how could things have turned out differently?
- How do the events and people of the summer finally force Kidd to face Devon and the belief that Kidd, by nature, is evil? Is there any one event or person that brings Kidd to the final breaking point?
- When Kidd is in the hospital in a coma, thinking he is in prison, he dreams about observing conversations. What is actually happening in his dreams? How do those dreams help Kidd come out of his coma?
- Mr. Red tells Kidd, "All the stuff we do every day, it's all hanging on by a thread" (page 287). What impact does this conversation have on Kidd who knows lives change in an instant?
- What clues has the author given the reader to recognize the truth that Kidd and Devon are the same person?
- How does the title, *I Will Save You*, relate to the major characters in the novel?



# We Were Here

An ALA-YALSA Best Book for Young Adults  
An ALA-YALSA Quick Pick for Reluctant  
Young Adult Readers  
A Junior Library Guild Selection

Life usually doesn't work out how you think it will. And most of the time, running away is the quickest path right back to what you're running from.

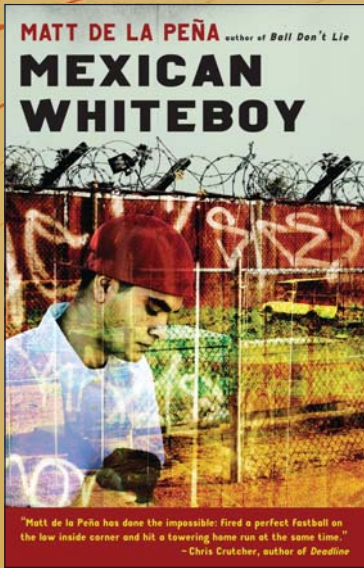
Grades 9 up

PB: 978-0-385-73670-1 • HC: 978-0-385-73667-1 • GLB: 978-0-385-90622-7

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Miguel is convinced that his mom would like for him to die, that she considers him already dead, that she doesn't want to talk to him. Are these assumptions the truth about Miguel's mother's feelings? On what does Miguel base these assumptions?
- Miguel raises a serious question for counselors in group homes: "You really think a punk-ass place like this could make a kid better?" (p. 14) What is Miguel inferring about the other residents and the care given in a group home? How would a counselor answer this question?
- How would Miguel describe Diego? After reading about Diego and his relationship with Miguel, how would you describe him?
- In his first month at the group home, Miguel refuses to talk to his counselors—or anyone else—about what happened to Diego. Why does Miguel isolate himself?
- Rondell and Mong are an unlikely pair for Miguel to hook up with. Why does Miguel choose to leave the group home with them to go to Mexico? What is he hoping to gain?
- Mong's cousin Mei-li wonders, "if growing up isn't the saddest thing that can happen to a person" (p. 89). For the characters in *We Were Here*, how could that be a true statement? In what ways does the statement not apply to the characters?
- Miguel repeatedly asks himself, "Shouldn't I have to pay for what I did? Shouldn't I have to suffer somehow?" How could his life on the run be considered payment for what he did? Why was he sentenced to one year in a group home?
- Why can't Miguel face what he did to Diego? Why can't he talk about it? What happens to Miguel when he finally faces the truth of his brother's death?
- Mong says he fights so well because he is not afraid to get hurt. How does that make him a good fighter? How does his lack of fear enable him to commit suicide? How do Rondell and Miguel react to Mong's death? Why don't they tell Jaden or try to contact Mei-li?
- How does the relationship between Miguel and Rondell grow and change throughout the novel? What needs do the boys meet in each other that helps form the strong bond between them?
- How do Miguel's grandparents help him accept what has happened? As a result of his time with them, what decisions does Miguel make?

"A story of friendship that will appeal to teens and will engage the most reluctant readers." —*Kirkus Reviews*



# MEXICAN WHITEBOY

An ALA-YALSA Top Ten Best Book for Young Adults  
 A Notable Books for a Global Society Selection  
 A *Bulletin Blue Ribbon Book*  
 A Junior Library Guild Selection

To find himself, Danny might just have to face the demons he refuses to see.

Grades 9 up

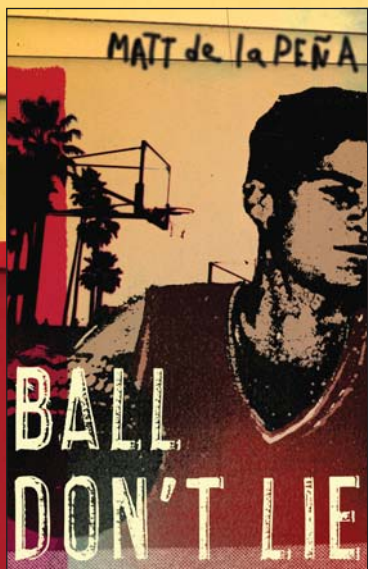
PB: 978-0-440-23938-3 • HC: 978-0-385-73310-6 • GLB: 978-0-385-90329-5

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why does Danny dig into his skin with his fingernails? How does the pain make him feel real? How do Danny's mom and uncles react when they realize what he is doing? How could they have helped him?
- Danny feels too brown to be a part of the baseball team and too white to be a member of his Mexican father's family. What could Danny do to fit in at both places? Why does he let the color of his skin prevent him from being a member of either community? How would Danny's life have been different if he had been raised in National City?
- How does Danny react to the news that his mother is moving to San Francisco with a white man? Why does he feel that his mother is dishonoring his father? What plans does Danny make as a result of the news?
- Danny's ability to play baseball is remarkable by any standard. What pushes him to practice hours a day, striving to be the best he can be? Why does he choke on the pitching mound? Why is it so important for him to show the team at his private school how good he is?
- The showdown between Uno and Uncle Ray is an important event in establishing Danny's reputation. What is at stake? What does Danny gain from the exchange? What, if anything, does Uno lose? How does the showdown shift the balance of power among all of the guys?
- The relationship between fathers and sons is examined through Uno and his father and Danny and his father. How are the boys' relationships with their fathers different? How are they the same? Does either Uno or Danny come to accept the relationships with their fathers?
- Danny and Uno have more in common than either of them realize. What motive does Uno have to make friends with Danny? What does each of the boys have to gain from their friendship? How does Uno help Danny overcome his pitching block?
- After Danny witnesses Uncle Ray murder a man in the streets, Danny is stunned at the rage his uncle displayed. How does this help give him an understanding of his father's character? How does Danny overcome the fear that he will one day be like his father and his uncles?
- Sophia asks Uno, "We all start out believing we can do anything. But at some point we lose it. Why is that?" (p. 212) Why do people lose sight of their dreams?

"Deftly explores the subject of interracial mixing."

~Multicultural Review



# BALL DON'T LIE

AN ALA-YALSA BEST BOOK FOR YOUNG ADULTS  
AN ALA-YALSA QUICK PICK FOR RELUCTANT YOUNG  
ADULT READERS

THIS URBAN MASTERPIECE TAKES PLACE  
WHERE THE STREET AND THE COURT MEET  
AND WHERE A BOY CAN BE ANYTHING IF HE  
PUTS HIS MIND TO IT.

Grades 9 up  
PB: 978-0-385-73425-7

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- On page 8, Sticky justifies stealing from a department store, but not stealing from an old lady's card shop. How does that distinguish him as a kid with morals? What changes in his life would cause him to attempt armed robbery? What role does Dante play in changing how Sticky views stealing?
- As he put a cigarette out behind Sticky's ear, Mico, one of Sticky's mom's boyfriends, reflected that he would, "make (Sticky) grow up to be a man." (p. 65) What kind of a man did Mico become due to the abuse he suffered? How does the abuse inflicted on Sticky affect Sticky's future?
- Why does Baby, Sticky's mom, fabricate so many different stories about who Sticky's father is? How do all these different accounts affect Sticky's self-image?
- When does Sticky's compulsive behavior of repetition begin? Why does he feel the need to do the same thing over and over until "it feels right" to him?
- When Chuck attempts to molest Sticky, why does Sticky run and tell the other guys? Why doesn't he handle Chuck himself and hide the embarrassing incident?
- When the director tells him, "You're a good person, Sticky," Sticky doesn't know how to respond, but wants to think of something good to say back to the director to make him feel like it isn't a mistake. (p. 180, 182) Why is Sticky so convinced that the director is mistaken?
- When Rob and Sticky get in a fight on the court, why does Dante step in to defend Sticky? (p. 216) Who started the fight? Why?
- When Dante explains his "race for life" theory to Sticky, he is totally in-his-face honest about Sticky's life in the foster care system. (p. 229) What is Dante's purpose in the conversation with Sticky? How does Sticky react to what Dante says? How does the conversation confirm to Sticky Dante's feelings for him?
- What role does Anh-thu play in Sticky's breakthrough from 10 years of pretending he doesn't exist? What does Sticky remember about his mother's death that frees him?

★ "AN INSPIRING STORY. STICKY IS A TRUE ORIGINAL, AND DE LA PEÑA HAS SKILLFULLY BROUGHT HIM TO LIFE."—*SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL*, STARRED

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Random House Children's Books • School and Library Marketing • 1745 Broadway, Mail Drop 10-4  
New York, NY 10019 • BN1019 • 10/10