Rodriguez Reading Guide

**Learning Objectives**|

Identify an author’s argument and how he supports it.

Analyze character changes, discussing in general terms and with reference to specific details in the text.

Infer an author’s characterization of a subject from what he says about it.

Draw conclusions about the significance of various moments with regards to greater themes in a story.

Make an argument using ideas gleaned from the text.

**Background Information**| The son of Mexican immigrants, Richard Rodriguez was born in the United States and grew up in a mixed-race neighborhood in Sacramento, California. In this opening chapter of his autobiography, *Hunger of Memory*, Rodriguez describes the tensions of navigating the Spanish-speaking world of his home life and the English-speaking world of school and public identity. Not a straightforward, chronological story of his childhood, Rodriguez describes what he gains and loses as he moves between these two realms of language. The story offers some personal insight into the role of language in integration: Rodriguez’s parents, in some ways, remain on the margins of society, not because they cannot function in English, but because they lack the comfort in English to claim a public identity. At the same time, the family’s home identity consists of an embrace of linguistic isolation.  But identity becomes a matter of distress to Rodriguez as he claims his English-speaking public identity only to find that his connections with his family and his culture are strained. Is this inevitable? Is it permanent? Does this problem change our evaluation of his Rodriguez’s argument against bilingual education? And what distinction is Rodriguez drawing between sounds and words?

Annotations for Reading (Using the Comment Tool make these annotations):

* changes the author undergoes;
* general conclusions that can be made about the author’s attitude toward English and Spanish; and
* the author’s ultimate argument against bilingual education.
* the role of language in integration

Peer Discussion Questions:

* How do language and a change in language affect family dynamics and one’s sense of belonging to a culture?
* What are the author’s overall feelings and associations with English and Spanish?
* Why is it telling that his family calls “the others” by the term “*los americanos*”?
* Why is it significant that his siblings don’t talk about school when they get home each day?
* In what ways is the author’s family integrated? In what ways are they not fully integrated?
* What role does language seem to play in integration?
* Why is Rodriguez upset when his parents speak to him in English?
* Why has Rodriguez described his family as “foreigners”, and how has his understanding changed in this second part of the text?
* What does the author gain and what does he lose when he begins to achieve proficiency in English?

Phases Chart: Peer Practice

Using the handout, make generalizations about the different phases the author and his family undergo as they learn English (you should not be quoting the text in the top boxes). Be prepared to defend your answers and describe the link between their supporting details and generalizations.

Questions and Hinge Moments:

Bullet out your ideas for the following questions:

* What does the author gain and what does he lose when he begins to achieve proficiency in English?
* Does he lose his intimacy and belonging when he speaks another language? Does he betray his culture? Does he gain a new identity?
* Does one have to lose one’s belonging to a culture when one integrates?
* What is the author’s argument against bilingual education? Do you agree with him?
* Discuss to what degree members of his family have achieved integration and why you think so.

Hinge Moments: Why are these key moments?

* Dad’s “shyness”
* Private loss and public gain
* The reactions of his relatives—“*pocho*”
* His gradual realization about intimacy
* Argument against bilingual education

**Extension Activities**

1. Prove or refute the following claim, using support from the text: The author believes he has lost his connection to his family as he has adopted English.
2. Write a short argumentative essay in which you discuss whether someone can truly belong to a culture if he/she does not comfortably speak the language.