

# QUESO

Just in Time,



# Educator's Guide

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# About the Book



If you could travel back in time to when your parents were your age, would you want to go? Quetzalcóatl Castillo Anguiano, better known as Queso, puts up with plenty of jokes about his name, but he carries it with pride. Named after his abuelo who sacrificed his dreams so future generations could chase theirs, Queso feels the weight of his family's history and the loss of his father. Since his father's death, he's wished for just one more moment together. And then one night, that wish comes true when he wakes up in 1985 and meets twelve-year-old Pancho, the boy who one day will become his dad. *Queso, Just in Time* focuses on how love stretches across generations, and how to cope with grief even when one might still yearn for the past.

# About the Author



**ERNESTO CISNEROS** was born and raised in Santa Ana, California, where he still teaches. He is the author of *Efrén Divided*, which won the Pura Belpré Children's Author Award, and *Falling Short*. He holds an English degree from the University of California, Irvine; a teaching credential from California State University, Long Beach; and Master of Fine Arts in creative writing from National University. As an author, he believes in providing today's youth with an honest depiction of characters with whom they can identify. The real world is filled with amazing people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. His work strives to reflect that. You can visit him online at [ernestocisneros.com](http://ernestocisneros.com).

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# Discussion Questions

1. When Queso whispers his wish to see his dad again, he doesn't expect it to come true. What does his wish show us about his love and longing for his father? Have you ever wished for a moment or memory you could relive, and why is this memory so important to you?
2. How does Queso's time in 1985 help him understand his dad in ways he couldn't before? What are some things about Pancho that surprise Queso?
3. Queso sees his dad as a hero, but during his time travel journey, he realizes his dad was also just a kid with insecurities like his own. How does this change the way Queso views his dad's bravery and strength, as well as his own?
4. Both Queso's abuelito and Pancho sacrifice their dreams for family. How do you feel about their choices? Would you make a similar choice? Why or why not? What was the outcome of their choices?
5. Time travel lets Queso process his grief in a unique way. How does meeting his dad as a boy help him heal and help him understand his father as a person more after his passing? How we can honor and remember someone after they're gone?
6. What differences does Queso notice between life in 1985 and life today? Which parts of being in middle school remain the same, even across different decades?
7. We often think of parents teaching their children lessons, but in this story, Queso helps Pancho believe in himself. How does that role reversal strengthen their relationship? What does Queso learn about the past and how it affects the present?
8. The novel explores how generations shape one another. How are Queso, Pancho, and Abuelito connected across time? How do each of their personal choices affect one another?
9. Queso realizes that his name is more than just something people joke about—it's part of a story that began generations before him. Hearing Pancho talk with such pride about the family name Quetzalcóatl helps Queso see how family stories and cultural roots give us strength. Why is it important for Queso to finally feel proud of his name? How does this scene remind us that our backgrounds and traditions are something to celebrate, not hide? What parts of your own story or heritage make you proud?
10. If you could meet a parent or grandparent when they were your age, what would you ask them? What would you like them to learn about you? Describe how you think this moment would go and how you would feel getting to know the younger version of a family member.

# Extension Activities

## A LETTER THROUGH TIME

Imagine you could send a letter to someone from another generation, such as your parent or grandparent—or even your future self. What advice or message would you share with them? Write it as Queso might write it to Pancho, reflecting on family, hope, and courage. Include a meaningful memory of your own that you experienced with them and tell them why it was important to you and how it made you feel.

## A MUSICAL JOURNEY: YOUR OWN SOUNDTRACK FOR 1985

Queso wakes up in the vibrant world of the '80s and gets to see the music, fashion, and experiences of that time. Research popular songs from the '80s and create a playlist of five to eight songs that you feel capture the story's emotions. Include a short reflection about why each song fits a moment or theme in the story and how it relates to Queso's journey in the book.

## A “FAMILY TREE OF DREAMS”

In Mr. Gleason's class, Queso is asked to create a family tree focused on memories and traditions and not just genetics. Draw or digitally create a “Family Tree of Dreams.” For each branch, write what a family member has dreamed of accomplishing, and how it relates to your own dreams and what you would like to achieve in the future. Write a short reflection afterward about how dreams can change across generations. Is there a dream that a family member had that you wish to achieve? Are your dreams different? How?

## DRAWING AND COLORING A TIME TRAVEL ENCOUNTER

Create, draw, and color a panel showing your own version of a time travel encounter as if it would fit in a page of your own comic book or graphic novel about the experience. Mention where you would go, who you would want to meet, and why you chose this as your time travel encounter. What lessons would you bring back?

## THE STORY OF MY NAME

After learning about the generations of Quetzalcóatl in Queso's family, we see that names can carry history, love, and legacy. Think about one of your own names—your first, middle, last, or even a nickname—and explore its story. You can ask a family member where your name came from or do some research to find out what it means. Then, write a short reflection or poem describing the story of your name. Be sure to include how your name connects to your identity, your family's story, or a value that is important to you. If you like, you can also add a creative touch around your writing, such as a colorful border, doodles, patterns, or a symbol that represents your culture, interests, or something unique about you.

Guide created by Aurora Dominguez, born and raised in Puerto Rico, and based in South Florida. Dominguez is an educator, journalist, and professor who currently teaches at Boca Raton Community High School. She holds a master's degree in mass communications and journalism from Florida International University and a certificate in English studies, focusing on the works of Shakespeare and Jane Austen, from Oxford University. [www.auroradominguez.com](http://www.auroradominguez.com).