

5. Whom do you see as the head of the Hernandez household? In discussing this, consider the episodes described in Chapters 4 and 5, when Mrs. Hernandez allows her abusive husband to be taken to jail but anxiously awaits his return. Is there a bread-winner in this family? Does the Hispanic culture have an influence on who assumes the role of the family figurehead? How does this affect Manny and his relationship with each of his parents? Keeping in mind all the situations in the year that the novel spans, who is the family's decision-maker?

6. Are you surprised by Mr. Hernandez's compassion at the conclusion of the "Family Affair" chapter, which details Magda's miscarriage? Why or why not? Do you think that Mrs. Hernandez and Manny's worry was necessary?

7. Victor Martinez is a native Californian who worked a variety of odd jobs and believes he was steered in the right direction by a couple of good teachers. How do you think that Martinez's life both influences and enhances Manny's tender story?

8. Throughout the novel, we get to know Nardo as Manny's strong older brother who knows how to have a good time, but doesn't necessarily know how to hold down a job. Manny and Nardo are clearly different, and Manny occasionally points these instances out. But how are Manny and Nardo alike? And what, specifically, is so different about the brothers? Is each of the brothers more like one of their parents?

9. Discuss the way Manny narrates the situation in "The Rifle," when Pede is almost shot. Who, if anyone, is blamed for the shooting?

10. Several of the characters in *Parrot in the Oven* idealize specific material possessions. Manny's wants a baseball glove "so bad a sweet hurt blossomed in his stomach whenever he thought about it" (p.7). Magda "lived and breathed to caress her records" (p.90). Mother has her movies and statues, and Father has his rifle. Why do the characters value these possessions? Is there any common characteristic among these desired items? Can you think of any other items that characters seek in this novel?

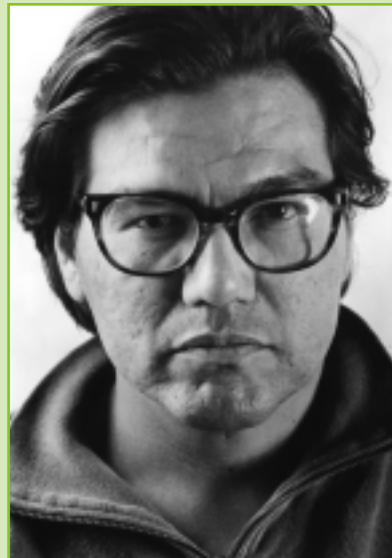


photo by Rubén Guzmán

Victor Martinez says that his background "makes up the stuff of his work." Born and raised in Fresno, California, the fourth in a family of twelve children, he attended California State University at Fresno and Stanford University. Mr. Martinez has also worked as a field laborer, welder, truck driver, firefighter, teacher, and office clerk.

Victor Martinez's poems, short stories, and essays have appeared in such prestigious publications as *Si*, *El Andar*, *The Bloomsbury Review*, and the *High Plains Literary Review*.

Victor Martinez lives with his wife in San Francisco. *Parrot in the Oven: mi vida*, winner of the National Book Award and the Pura Belpre Award, is his first novel.

Recommended Reading List:

Girl Goddess #9
By Francesca Lia Block

Seedfolks
By Paul Fleischman

Red Scarf Girl
By Ji-li Jiang

Mick
By Chris Lynch

Deliver Us From Evie
By M. E. Kerr

Coming in Spring-Summer 1998
Laughing Out Loud, I Fly
By Juan Felipe Herrera

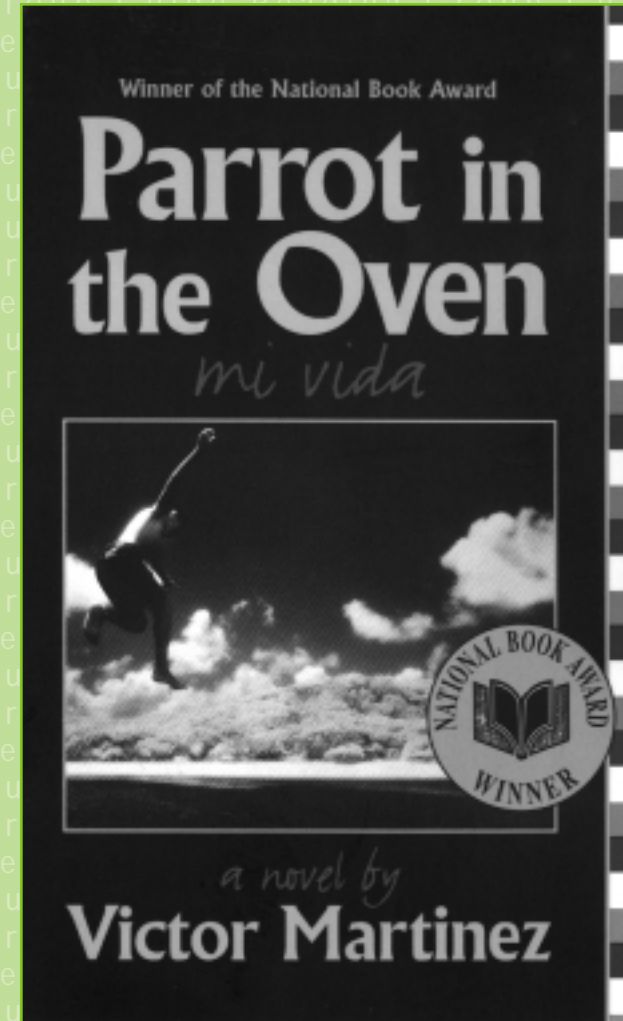
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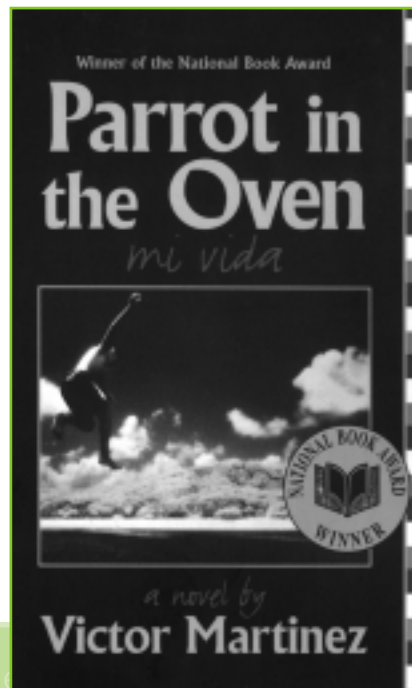


About this Guide:

Winner of the 1996 National Book Award in the Young People's Literature category, *Parrot in the Oven: mi vida* deals with the pressures of family and community that Manny Hernandez faces during the fourteenth year of his life. The discussion topics, suggested reading list, and author biography in this reading group guide are intended to spark discussion about the issues raised in this highly acclaimed, fascinating book.

About this Book:

Manny Hernandez's dad is always calling him *el perico*, or "the parrot," from a Mexican saying about a parrot who complains how hot it is in the shade while all along he's sitting in the oven and doesn't know it. But Manny, wanting to be smarter than the parrot, struggles with the awkwardness of adolescence as he searches for acceptance and becomes a *vato firme*, a stand-up guy.



Rich imagery in a series of vividly real vignettes guides us around the obstacles in Manny's coming-of-age—pressure to join a gang, awkward crushes, and fitting in with friends. Manny also copes with the characters in his crazy family—a drunk father, a brother who “flips through more jobs than a thumb through a deck of cards,” a mother who compulsively scrubs, hoping her troubles will be washed away, and a sister who has a miscarriage.

Powerful and poignant, gripping and gritty, *Parrot in the Oven: mi vida*, Victor Martinez's debut novel, is the beautifully written account of one observant and sensitive Mexican-American boy's coming-of-age in the confusing world of an urban California housing project.

Critical Acclaim:

“A triumph of a novel.”

—Joyce Carol Thomas, children's book author
and chair of the National Book Award committee,
in her presentation of the NBA to Victor Martinez

“Martinez writes with clear insight into the Chicano culture. His narrative is poetic, at times almost delicate, in depicting the joys, sorrows, and traumas of the Hernandez family.”

—*School Library Journal*

“Martinez's honest voice, and descriptions sprinkled with elegant imagery, offer a rare and consummately believable portrait of barrio life.” (Starred review)

—*Publishers Weekly*

Winner of 1998 Pura Belpré Award

Winner of the 1996 National Book Award

Winner of the 1996 Americas Award

A Selection of The Horn Book's

1997 Fanfare Honor List

A Publishers Weekly “Best Book of 1996”

For Discussion:

1. Reviewed as a “brilliant, witty memoir of a Mexican-American adolescence” (*U. S. News and World Report*), *Parrot in the Oven* is clearly a story highly influenced by the race and culture of its protagonist. But the crises and problems that Manny experiences—love, violence, sibling conflicts, gangs—are universal obstacles in teenage life. How do Manny's experiences speak to readers of all genders, races, and socioeconomic levels? How is Manny's story specific to the Hispanic-American *barrio* life that the author introduces? Are there certain experiences that are more applicable to urban communities? Males?
2. In Chapter 4, “The Bullet,” we discover the meaning of the book's title. Is *el perico* an accurate description of Manny? Is it ironic that Manny's father calls him this? In what ways is Manny trusting or not trusting? How does Manny become wiser in the course of the novel? What light does the title's significance shed on Manny's relationship with his father and on his father's personality?
3. Readers of *Parrot in the Oven* plunge into Manny's world through a series of chapter-length vignettes, each detailing a specific episode in Manny's critical fourteenth year of life. Before he wrote *Parrot in the Oven*, Victor Martinez was primarily a short-story writer and poet. Do you think that the format of this novel is influenced by Martinez's work as a poet? Can the vignettes be appreciated as separate entities? What links each episode to the others in the novel?
4. Overflowing with figurative language, *Parrot in the Oven* is “a whirlwind of surprising similes and inventive turns of phrase” (*Kirkus Reviews*). How does Martinez's rich language make Manny's story more poignant? Did the language enrich your reading of this novel? What are some of the most memorable metaphors and images in the novel? Do you notice any recurring metaphors?