



## Thirty Talks Weird Love

written by Alessandra Naváez Varela

### About the Book

**Genre:** Realistic Fiction

**Format:** Hardcover  
208 pages, 5-1/2 x 8-1/2

**ISBN:** 9781947627482

**Reading Level:** Grade 7

**Interest Level:** Grades 7–College

**Guided Reading Level:** Y

**Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:**  
N/A

**Lexile™ Measure:** N/A

\*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

**Themes:** Childhood Experiences and Memories, Dreams & Aspirations, Fiction, Friendship, History, Identity/Self Esteem/Confidence, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican Interest, Mexico, Overcoming Obstacles, Poetry, Teen Interest, YA interest, Scifi

**Resources on the web:**

[leeandlow.com/books/thirty-talks-weird-love](http://leeandlow.com/books/thirty-talks-weird-love)

### SYNOPSIS

Out of nowhere, a lady comes up to Anamaria and says she's her, from the future. But Anamaria's thirteen, she knows better than to talk to a stranger. Girls need to be careful, especially in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico--it's the 90's and fear is overtaking her beloved city as cases of kidnapped girls and women become alarmingly common. This thirty-year-old "future" lady doesn't seem to be dangerous but she won't stop bothering her, switching between cheesy Hallmark advice about being kind to yourself, and some mysterious talk about saving a girl.

Anamaria definitely doesn't need any saving, she's doing just fine. She works hard at her strict, grade-obsessed middle school--so hard that she hardly gets any sleep; so hard that the stress makes her snap not just at mean girls but even her own (few) friends; so hard that when she does sleep she dreams about dying--but she just wants to do the best she can so she can grow up to be successful. Maybe Thirty's right, maybe she's not supposed to be so exhausted with her life, but how can she ask for help when her city is mourning the much bigger tragedy of its stolen girls?

This thought-provoking, moving verse novel will lead adult and young adult readers alike to vital discussions on important topics--like dealing with depression and how to recognize this in yourself and others--through the accessible voice of a thirteen-year-old girl.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

## BACKGROUND

### Author's Note from Alessandra Naváez Varela

"Since the 1990s girls and women have disappeared and been "found" by the hundreds in Ciudad Juárez. The thousands. This book says, We will always remember you. Your deaths mean more than a headline. Justice is yet to be done.

*Thirty Talks Weird Love* is foremost dedicated to the girls and women of Ciudad Juárez whom we've lost. As a Mexican American woman who is a native of Ciudad Juárez, and who walks its streets with a mixture of love, fear, and awe, their loss strikes a nerve frayed in me since I was ten years old. Beyond country and gender, this is my responsibility: to remember and bear witness.

The families of these girls and women don't rest. Their lives are defined by their fight: in protests, in repainting black crosses against pink backgrounds. In living with the memories of their daughters day after day. This book is dedicated to them too: I am awed and humbled by your strength. Your daughters inspire a brand of courage I can only wear with my head bowed through my work as a writer and teacher.

This book is also dedicated to Ciudad Juárez: you will always be my home, mi segunda madre.

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I've been living in El Paso, Texas for 13 years, but I was born and raised in Ciudad Juárez, México, and my life is not what I pictured it would be when I was 13: I was to be a doctor, not a writer and teacher. This childhood plan stemmed from wanting to soothe the burning backs of my parents, who have worked hard since I can remember. Did they ask for this? Never. This was just my idea of honoring my parents' labor. I also loved science, school, and the prospect of helping babies come into the world. My plans, motivations, and personality were a match.

Fast forward to age 25 when I started medical school in Galveston, Texas. Drinking water from a fire hose is a popular metaphor to describe the kind of learning that goes on during med school. One year into my degree I knew it was inaccurate: it was more like drinking from a roaring waterfall. Nevertheless, I passed my classes and signed up for a Global Medicine track that took me to India for a month during my first summer break. I was changed by that trip. Back from this land of technicolor—from the saris and the food to the energy of its people and its passionate, polyglot health practitioners—I did a preceptorship with Texas Tech's Department of Family Medicine in El Paso. Life was beyond good. I was ready to begin my second year.

Or so I thought. The worst depressive episode of my life surprised me only weeks into the year when I stopped attending class and studied very little. I turned to junk food, Netflix, and drinking water straight from one-gallon containers, which cluttered the floor of my small bedroom. I bathed sporadically. What had happened?

Fast forwards can hide important events. When I was 17, I tried to commit suicide. I never took time to take stock of why. Like Anamaria, I was a nervous and obsessive child who only thought about school and perfection. It makes sense that, when I attempted to take my life, I thought I didn't have

the time to talk to my parents and ask for help. What for? I had too many things to do. Too much to learn. Success would justify and bury it all.

Still in Galveston, my daytime existence and diet—Little Debbie Oatmeal Creme Pies, episode after episode of *30 Rock*, and water—was further complicated by dreams of a gun pointed at my temple. I recognized the feeling from when I was 17: I wanted relief. Again. Success had come up short. This time I talked a little to my roommate and best friend, Jazmín, about my “lack of motivation.” She helped as much as she could with the information she had, but to no avail. I couldn’t go back to that driven self that I had been.

The pushing force arrived through a thought I had when lying on the floor, which I did often to anchor my head to the ground: what would Leyla, my niece who was only a few months old, be told about me if I died? This opened a floodgate: Will she be happy? What will she grow up to be like? What will she look like? I couldn’t bear not to know.

I made an appointment to speak to a nurse practitioner about my symptoms. I was prescribed an antidepressant. I left Galveston for El Paso with plans to come back after a one-year leave of absence. During that time, I took care of Leyla while my sister worked, and lived by my niece’s daytime feeding and napping schedule. It was a steep learning curve, but I was thankful because watching her grow occupied most of my time. There was also Paul and knowing that kind of love and support for the first time. As far as therapy, I visited a psychologist once or twice to talk about what had happened, but I was still hyper focused on the future: I would pull through and laugh about it all when I graduated, when I got my first paycheck.

Once back in Galveston, I changed my studying methods, exercised, continued taking my antidepressant, and visited a psychiatrist when I started losing sleep over the things I hadn’t done to “master” the material. She prescribed medication for that and told me I would be able to rest after my study marathons. I didn’t. Then I took my first exam: I knew I had failed it even before I saw my grade.

My brain went into shock, and the meaning of this failure became worse than the reality. So, days before my 27th birthday, I emailed my dean to say I was leaving and sold my books and furniture on Facebook to raise the money for a small U-Haul. First-year medical students who came over to pick up their purchases were often puzzled when they asked if I had graduated, and I replied no. Yes, I wanted to say, I was leaving all of it behind: my childhood plans, my way to honor my parents.

Eight years have gone by since this happened. I have no regrets because I acted in self-defense for probably the first time in my school-obsessed life. I’ve come to realize that this so-called “failure” was only a setback. Evidently my illness was not under control; otherwise, I think I would’ve accepted that grade for what it was: a pebble, not a boulder. Over time, the pebble I skipped led me to two callings I deeply cherish: writing and teaching. And both have allowed me to explore bigger questions: what if I had talked to a therapist when I was 17? What if that student were to seek help? Should I step in to help them consider or accelerate this decision?

As some of my former high-school and college students will attest, the answer is often yes. First through informal conversations—during recess, tutoring sessions, office hours, after class, in emails—when students shared their experiences and I shared mine. Then through *Thirty*, and now *Thirty Talks Weird Love*. At first, my desire to share what I had learned in hindsight with the young people I was working with was stronger than the memories of my teenagehood, or lack thereof, through Anamaria. But she came into the picture, vital and refreshing, just as my students do, to teach me that in looking to our past we should see just how strong and beautiful we were.

As far as the present, it's all we have. A cliché, I realize, but we are here now. Not yesterday or tomorrow. So, don't wait: get to the phone or computer and find the help you need to make this time on earth as joyful and full as it can be ([suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)). Not ready? Go to family, friends, or teachers who talk about mental illness openly; they might help you get over the threshold. Go to books that do the same. Authors manage mental illness awareness in their work in different ways, but I believe most of us are just trying to say this: Dear Reader, you are not alone. As for *Thirty Talks Weird Love*, I want to say there's both an Anamaria and a Thirty within you waiting to be heard. Please end the wait, and listen to them."

### Additional Background about Ciudad Juárez and Missing Women & Girls

Since the early 1990s more than 370 women and girls were murdered in the Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua (<https://web.archive.org/web/20120303202439/http://www.amnestyusa.org/node/55339?page=2>), a number that is more than likely underreported. This violence against women and girls were often due to color and class differences. As many of the victims were darker skinned and poor, authorities did not deeply investigate or address the problem. Instead, these girls and women became collateral damage, a result of structural neglect. Even for those that did not go missing, living in constant fear and sadness as friends, sisters, classmates, mothers, and family went missing, took a toll on their mental health. Thanks to the efforts of the families of the victims and local non-for-profit women's organizations, awareness was raised to combat this injustice.

In memory of all the violated Mexican women and girls, *Thirty Talks Weird Love*, a beautiful verse story, describes how violence, fear, friendship, and love, shaped the lives of many girls in Ciudad Juárez.

Below are resources for those who may be affected or who wish to support someone through mental health issues.

- Childhelp: [childhelp.org](https://childhelp.org): A 24-hour, seven-days-a-week child-abuse hotline with professional counselors. Childhelp provides crisis intervention, information, literature, and referrals.
- Suicide Prevention: [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org): The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals in the United States.
- Mental Health Awareness Month: <https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/Awareness-Events/Mental-Health-Awareness-Month>: The month of May is Mental Health Awareness Month. This initiative aims to fight stigma, provide support, educate the public and advocate for policies that support people with mental illness and their families.

The themes in this story must be addressed and handled with deep sensitivity and open mindedness.

Teachers must be aware and prepared that by teaching this novel (and the corresponding topics addressed in it) they may be addressing a legacy of harm and violence, specifically within largely minority and underrepresented socioeconomic groups.

Set the example of what culturally responsive teaching looks like:

- Collaborate with students to establish guidelines early on. This will serve as a reminder for discussion etiquette as thought-provoking topics are developed.
- Anticipate how your students will respond to controversial topics presented in the novel (colorism, depression, suicide). While teachers should encourage students to share their views without fear of judgment, teachers should consider how to respond to emotion, and use this to guide instruction and for future instructional planning.
- Don't be afraid to share your own learning journey as it pertains to cultural identity and mental health. This will create a positive classroom climate and an overall feeling of sameness.
- Aim to include and discuss outside materials that align with the text and essentially address underrepresented groups' experiences in ways that do not trivialize or marginalize their experiences.

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

Teachers must be aware and prepared that by teaching this novel (and the corresponding topics addressed in it) they may be addressing a legacy of harm and violence, specifically within largely minority and underrepresented socioeconomic groups.

- What are your dreams? Who do you think you will be in the future?
- How can poetry influence someone's life?
- Ask students what they know about depression? What characteristics do students associate with depression?
- What do you enjoy about your neighborhood and what do you dislike? Why may a person have complicated feelings about the place they grew up?
- As a hook for readers, consider showing students a video on femicide in Ciudad Juárez, posted on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4ETx5uK0mA>

- **Bilingual Easter Egg Hunt:** This activity can be done prior to reading the novel and during whole class or guided reading groups. *Thirty Talks Weird Love* contains many Spanish words, as well as English words with Spanish cognates. Present the students with a vocabulary list of content specific words. Which ones do they know? Which ones do they not know? Invite them to look up the meanings of the words using a translation website. Students may keep records of the translations. Once they've been introduced to the vocabulary, introduce the Easter Egg Hunt. The teacher may stuff the eggs with both Spanish and English vocabulary. During the reading, student(s) who identify the word or translation will pause the lesson and go on an Easter Egg Hunt. The first student to locate the proper egg wins a prize.

You may want to have students journal their responses to these questions or pose the final question as a KWL discussion and chart so that you can refer back to it throughout and after the reading of the book to further their thinking on the topic(s).

### Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- **Book Walk:** Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, table of contents, author's dedication, and author's note at the end. Display the book and read aloud the title.
- **Book Title Exploration:** Talk about the title of the book. Ask students what they think this book will most likely be about. What does weird love mean? What do students think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that? Discuss the cover illustration and have students talk about how the picture might relate to the title of the book.
- Encourage students to stop and jot in their notebooks when they: Learn new information, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or see new words.

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- what is femicide?
- why did girls and women in Ciudad Juárez live in fear?
- how did poetry influence Anamaria's life?
- how did gender, class, and colorism shape the experiences of the characters in the story?
- what is the importance of self-love in the story?
- how do young people show resilience through difficult times?

Encourage students to consider why the author, Alessandra Narváez Varela would want to share this story with young people.

## VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word. (Many of the Spanish words can be found in the book glossary, but there are also some that are not included. Students could be encouraged to create a log of these words—they will not be listed here.)

### Content Specific

bunker, prefect, taquería, calcetas, tarahumara, barbacoa, maquiladoras, bizcochos, machetera, machete, telenovela, güera, paciencia, tarea, panaderías, águila, mamaleche, marranitos, voladores, sobrina, el canario, equilibrio, panza, curtsy, meniscus, perdón, mooning, sandía, kaleidoscope, quinceañera

### Academic

palette, iridescent, diminutives, hypothesis, echoing, periodic table, salvation, mystical, inscribe, harmonize, femicide, homicide, inquiry, bigotes, impaled, prairie, merciless, doppelganger, suicide, leprosy, isolated, enchanting, cartilage, frail, submerge, irises, morse-code, suspended, immobile, punctuality, metaphor, pupil, inflamed, venom, resonate, depressed, elevate, humanity, hermit, accolades

## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

### Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Where does Anamaria first meet Thirty?
2. Why is a bunker in Ciudad Juárez appealing?
3. Where does Anamaria go to school?

4. How does Anamaria feel about math?
5. How old is Anamaria and how old is her future self? What is the age difference between them?
6. What is Thirty's job?
7. What does Anamaria want to be when she grows up?
8. Who is Delfina Lince Islas? Who is Margarita? How did Anamaria meet them?
9. Who are Chachita and Papiringo?
10. How does Chachita react to meeting Thirty? Why does she react to Thirty like that?
11. What does food signify for Anamaria?
12. How did Anamaria's parents get their nicknames?
13. Who is Anamaria's science teacher?
14. What is the science assignment Anamaria must get done in a week? How does she complete the assignment?
15. What gift does Thirty present to Anamaria?
16. Why does Margarita not want to be friends with Anamaria anymore?
17. What role does El Colorín play in Anamaria's life?
18. What languages does Anamaria speak?
19. Does Anamaria want to call Margarita? Why or why not?
20. How does Anamaria feel about the fair she attends?
21. Who did Mr. Yeyé lose? How does this impact his relationship with Anamaria?
22. What does Anamaria pray for?
23. Who is Alexa and how does she treat Anamaria?
24. Who is Anamaria's celebrity crush?
25. How did Anamaria's parents meet?
26. What was Papiringo's nickname back in the day?
27. Why does Thirty knock on Anamaria's window in the middle of the night?
28. Who sense Anamaria a paper plane and what does it say?
29. How many sisters does Margarita have?
30. How does Anamaria feel about her body? Why does she feel this way?
31. What happens after Anamaria uses Nair?
32. How does Chachita console Anamaria after Anamaria's Nair incident?
33. Who was the boy dangling from the bridge?

34. What is the first thing Anamaria chooses to love about herself?
35. How does Anamaria spend her Sundays?
36. Describe what happens after Alexa trips Anamaria with a backpack?
37. What magic tricks does Anamaria perform for her parents so that they do not worry about her?
38. What is Thirty's poem about?
39. Why does Anamaria compare Priscila to God?
40. How does Papiringo feel about Anamaria going to Margarita's house? Why is he worried?
41. How does Anamaria feel about getting the first place on the honor roll?
42. What happens to Margarita?
43. Why does Anamaria punch Alexa?
44. Who does Anamaria meet in the bathroom stall? Describe their encounter.
45. Why does Anamaria have to sing in the Regional Singing Olympics?
46. What promise does Margarita ask of Anamaria in "Watermelon Sun"?
47. How does Anamaria feel about leaving Sor?
48. Why does Alexa want to jump from the bridge?
49. How does Thirty describe depression?
50. What art do Anamaria, Priscila, Pipina, and Alexa each have?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. In Alessandra Narvez Varela's dedication she writes, "poetry doesn't give back life, poetry is not justice, but she remembers and doesn't let us forget." How is poetry an act of remembering? Why is memory important in this story?
2. Why do you think Alessandra Narvez Varela's decided to write this novel in verse? Why not use prose? Do you agree with her decision? Why or why not?
3. How does Anamaria deal with the pressures of school?
4. What does the vent represent for Anamaria?
5. How does being bilingual impact Anamaria's poetry?
6. What is femicide? How does it play a role in the story?
7. What does being a girl in Ciudad Juerez mean for Anamaria?
8. Why is the honor roll so important in this story? What does it signify for the different characters? What does it mean to Anamaria?
9. Why does poetry become so lifechanging for Anamaria?

10. Why does Anamaria find it hard to sleep? What kind of reoccurring dreams does she have?
11. What are some of the shared characteristics of the girls who go missing?
12. How does Anamaria come to love herself?
13. How do Anamaria's experiences throughout the story change her?
14. What evidence in the book demonstrates Anamaria is struggling with depression and thoughts of suicide?
15. Why is Anamaria scared to ask for help?
16. What is the role of family and friendship in helping Anamaria become who she is by the end of the book?
17. The story is told from Anamaria's perspective. How would the story have been different if it were told from Margarita's perspective? Thirty's perspective? Pipina's perspective? How does the perspective of the narration affect how you experience the story?
18. How did you feel about the way *Thirty Talks Weird Love* ended? Were you satisfied with the ending? Why or why not?
19. How does the Author's Note impact your reading of the story? What did you learn from the Author's Note?
20. What is the significance of the title '*Thirty Talks Weird Love*' after reading?

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What do you think the author's message to the reader is? Think about possible motivations behind Alessandra Narváez Varela intentions to write the book. What do you think they wanted to tell young readers?
2. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to your own life? What do Anamaria's experiences, thoughts, and feelings mean to you? What are ways you express yourself after experiencing difficult emotions?
3. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *Thirty Talks Weird Love*? Why did you make those connections?
4. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world or on the news? Why did *Thirty Talks Weird Love* make you think of that?
5. How has reading *Thirty Talks Weird Love* impacted your understanding of love? What are some other ways people define love? How would you define love?

6. Colorism is prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group. in the mistreatment and isolation of people based on their race and the color of their skin. Have you or someone you know ever been treated differently based on the color of one's skin? How did you feel experiencing this or witnessing it? How did you react? What can we do to confront this kind of discrimination?
7. Anamaria's friendships have challenges at different points in the story, but ultimately are an important part of her journey to self-love. What does friendship mean to you? Think of the friends in your life who you look to for guidance and support. How do these people support and help you? How have these people helped you overcome obstacles and challenges?

### ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)  
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review several chapters and have students summarize what happened, first orally, and then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students illustrate a goal or dream of their own they have.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
6. Complete frequent checks of understanding.
7. Read aloud a sentence and have students repeat the sentence after you, pointing to each word as they speak.

### Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. Throughout the story Anamaria struggles to love herself. Why is it important to love yourself? Make a list of all the things about yourself that you love. Write a poem about what it feels like to love yourself.
2. How did Anamaria deal with her depression? How did people in Anamaria's life support her when she needed help? What did you learn about dealing with difficult feelings from Anamaria's experience?
3. Have you ever felt pressure to be perfect? What does this pressure feel like and what strategies do you use to overcome the feeling?
4. What are the different ways Anamaria apologizes in the book? What are the important components of an apology? Who does she apologize to? Why does she apologize to them? How do you apologize to people that you love? How do they respond?
5. Choose an emotion that interests you: happiness, sadness, fear, anxiety, frustration, hope, perseverance and so on. Illustrate or act out what that emotion looks like in *Thirty Talks Weird Love*.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

### English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Challenge students to explore the characters more deeply with writing tasks that require perspective-taking:** Write a letter from one character to another (i.e. from Alexa to Anamaria or from Mr. Yeyé to his niece). Have students discuss in small groups about which characters they chose and why. Have students read share their letters with the class.
- **Poetry often uses rich figurative language.** Search through *Thirty Talks Weird Love* to identify one example of each: simile, metaphor, personification, and hyperbole. Record your answers in your journal.
- **Write a letter to your future self or to your younger self.** What advice would you give? What are your hopes for that version of yourself? See “Dear Niña Bonita” for reference. Have students refer to the dialogue throughout the book between Thirty and Anamaria for reference.
- **Identify three major themes of the story.** Use details from the novel to support each theme. Write an analytical essay highlighting the three themes of students’ choice.
- **Community is a recurring theme in the novel.** Anamaria shares her community in the poem “Us: The Aragón Sosa Family”. Now, write a poem of the same title detailing information about your community.
- **Choose your favorite subject in school and write a poem about it.** Why did you choose to write about this subject? How does it make you feel?
- **Assign students different characters from the book and have them brainstorm about a guiding question:** what and how can this character teach us? Students can think about different characters to examine as a whole class and then break into smaller, specific character groups. Encourage students to think about how characters have made mistakes and also have done good things in the book, and ultimately what they learned from that character. Have students share out their findings: How is this character important to the book, and what lessons did they teach us over the course of the story? How did their actions develop the narrative, and why are they crucial to understanding the meaning of the book?
- **Write an alternative ending to the story that is different from the one the author wrote.** Ask students to think about the following questions: What would you change about

the ending? What would you change about the characters? Why did you write the ending in this way?

- **Ask each student to select a poem/chapter from *Thirty Talks Weird Love* and write their reactions to the poem.** Why did the student pick that poem? What stood out to them? What did they relate to? What did the student identify with or what they learn from that poem? How did that poem make the student feel?
- **Have students read *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces* ([leeandlow.com/books/gabi-a-girl-in-pieces](https://leeandlow.com/books/gabi-a-girl-in-pieces)) which is a coming of age story about a Mexican girl who overcomes obstacles and uses poetry to find her voice.** As students reflect on the story, ask them to compare it to *Thirty Talks Weird Love*. What are the differences and similarities between Gabi and Anamaria? What does each story demonstrate about family and friendship? What does each story reveal about the value of poetry and storytelling?
- **Conduct a unit on novels in verse. Along with *Thirty Talks Weird Love*, have students read *Under the Mesquite* ([leeandlow.com/books/under-the-mesquite](https://leeandlow.com/books/under-the-mesquite)).** Afterwards, have students write an essay using the following guiding questions: what do these novels have in common? What was it like to read a novel in verse as opposed to prose? What similar problems did the main characters have? How were their struggles presented in the poetry?
- **Have students come up with a list of questions to ask author Alessandra Narváez Varela.** What do students want to know about the process behind writing a book? How did she come up with their idea to write *Thirty Talks Weird Love*? What was it like to write the book? Why did she write the book in verse? Why did she base the book off of similar things that happened in her own life? Consider contacting Alessandra to learn more about school and library visits (<https://alessandranarvaezvarela.com/contact>).
- **Encourage students to read the Lee & Low blog post from Alessandra Narváez Varela, "All the Bilinguals I've Been" (<https://blog.leeandlow.com/2021/11/18/all-the-bilinguals-ive-been-a-guest-post-by-author-alessandra-narvaez-varela/>).** Have students write a reaction essay after reading the blog post. What did they learn from the blog post? How did they connect to Alessandra's experiences?

### Social Studies & Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3; Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9; and Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3; Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6; Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9; and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Design a lesson or unit on the missing girls in Ciudad Juárez.** Learning goals should highlight key aspects including but not limited to time period, media coverage, class backgrounds, and community responses. What challenges were girls and women facing due to race, gender, class, sexuality or other factors? Look up newspaper and magazine articles from this time in addition to online resources from today (<https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-juarez-missing-pictures-photogallery.html>) (<https://projects.seattletimes.com/2020/>

femicide-juarez-mexico-border/) (<https://www.texasmonthly.com/news-politics/podcast-missing-women-juarez/>)

- **Ask students to research Mexico in the 1990s.** What was going on socially and politically at that time in history? What did the cities look like? What challenges did low-income families who lived in Mexico face? Discuss how this information helps students understand Anamaria's childhood and experiences.

### Arts/Performing Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Create a poster the brings awareness to the missing girls and women in Ciudad Juárez.** Students can refer to the poster Anamaria makes in *Thirty Talks Weird Love*. Students can conduct additional research to inform their poster-making (<https://www.vice.com/en/article/av9daj/the-bedrooms-of-mexicos-missing-women-876>).
- **Use a movie or video platform to create a book trailer for the novel. Refer to ReadWriteThink.org** (<https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/book-report-alternative-creating-c>). What do students want to include in their trailer? How can a book trailer encourage other students to read the book?
- **Put students in small groups where each group is assigned to read and perform one of Anamaria's poems to the rest of the class.** Have students discuss what they liked or did not like about the poem and why.
- **Ask students to write their own poem about a cause they care about or difficult moment they had to overcome.** Encourage students to have their poems reflect their personal experiences and/or their feelings and opinions. Have students perform their work. Refer to ReadWriteThink.org (<http://www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/tips-howtos/help-child-write-poem-30317.html?main-tab=2>)
- **A few of the poems in *Thirty Talks Weird Love* are accompanied by pictures/drawing.** Choose a poem from the book and draw a picture that reflects what is happening in the poem.
- **Have students create a book cover for a book about their life.** Provide students with time and materials to create their book cover and display them in your classroom or hallway.

### School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Ask students to create portraits of their close friends through drawing, collage, or photograph.** In writing, students should describe what actions and qualities they admire about their friend/s. Students can write in prose or submit a poem or song.
- **Interview a friend or family member who has lost a loved one in the past.** Question their strategies for how they coped both before and after the loss. What lessons were learned? What memories will always be cherished?
- **If accessible, have students and families research other titles featuring the experiences of people from Mexico.** Students can go to their local or school librarian and consult their librarian for assistance.



## Ordering Information

### General Order Information:

[leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](https://leeandlow.com/contact/ordering)

### Secure Online Ordering:

[leeandlow.com/books/thirty-talks-weird-love](https://leeandlow.com/books/thirty-talks-weird-love)

 **By Phone:** 212-779-4400 ext. 25

 **By Fax:** 212-683-1894

### By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,  
New York, NY 10016

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Alessandra Narváez Varela** was born and raised in Ciudad Juárez, México. She earned a B.S. in Biology and a Bilingual M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Texas at El Paso, where she now teaches. *Thirty Talks Weird Love* is her debut novel. She lives in El Paso, Texas. Visit her website at [alessandranarvaezvarela.com](https://alessandranarvaezvarela.com).

## REVIEWS

"Much like plumbing the contents of a poet's composition notebook, this layered story rewards multiple reads." —*Publishers Weekly*

"A must for every library given its timely themes, international setting, and authentic protagonist voice." —*School Library Journal*, **starred review**

"Fans of *The House on Mango Street* or *The House of the Spirits* will be riveted by the question of whether Anamaria can protect the girls of Ciudad Juárez—and herself—from horrifying fates." —*Booklist*, **starred review**

"Anamaria's compelling, clever voice will make her friends and endear her to those who feel her strains." —*The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

"A gritty and absorbing tale of learning to love oneself and one's roots, warts and all." —*Kirkus Reviews*

## ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

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