

# Quick-start to CI: whole class novel

**Whole class reading means that all of the students are reading the same novel at the same time with guidance and help from the teacher.**

## Novels as Curriculum

### **Why is a whole-class novel a quick-start to teaching with CI?**

Many educators who are dedicated to improving their students' proficiency, but are new to the CI method, are using whole-class novels as a quick-start to change. The safest and easiest way to slide into CI is to adopt novels to use in place of traditional curriculum.

The shift away from traditional L2 teaching to a comprehensible input approach can seem daunting. We all know that comprehensible input is the path to L2 proficiency. We all know that CI = L2 comprehensible input (listening and reading), but how to continuously achieve that level of 90% L2CI is not as simple as it sounds at first.

*What do I say? How do I keep it going? How do I engage students? How do I make myself comprehensible while dreaming up some story? How do I keep up my classroom management while I'm dancing around hoping that I can keep thinking of what to do next?*

### **Teaching a whole-class novel not only floods students with L2 input but can also...**

- Be the route to countless, natural and relevant discussions
- Offer unique cultural insight
- Present a geographical, political or socio-economic context to explore
- Build important life-long reading skills
- Create community in your classroom
- Provide structure and stability
- Give you tangible answers when asked what you are doing in class, by administration and parents
- Build students' confidence as they realize the accomplishment of reading a novel in another language.

### **How to transform a novel into a CI teaching unit?**

- Choose the right novel
- Order materials
- Look ahead in small pieces
- Begin and don't look back
- Explore the setting of the story
- Invite insightful conversation
- Guide them to read deeply
- Assess and adjust

#### **Choose the right novel:**

- Choose level appropriate material for your program—a novel that will provide comprehensible and compelling input for your students.
- Choose one that you can guide your students through without too much new vocabulary that must be taught before each section.
- Choose a “novel” book, a novel that is unfamiliar to your students, something they have never seen before so that it is exciting and new.
- Choose a geographical setting or cultural perspective that that ignites YOUR passion, a place that YOU have been or something that YOU believe is of historical or cultural value. Students' choice is important, but YOU must choose the book. If YOU love what you are leading the class to read, the experience becomes a powerful learning opportunity.

#### **Order materials:**

- These little books only cost \$6 to \$9 each! Keep in mind that you are asking your district to spend a few hundred dollars instead of thousands on new textbooks that can cost over \$80 a copy!
- Take the largest class sizes that will be using the book and add 10 to 15% to that number. Order more copies than you think you need. Students accidentally take them home or borrow them many of those paperbacks never make it back to the classroom. It is not worth the frustration to be short a couple of copies.
- Order all support materials available. If a Teacher's Guide is available for the novel, order it! It will give you valuable ideas and activities that you can customize or parts and pieces to use as you see fit.
- If the book has an audiobook recording, buy it. You may not use it every single day, but it is another useful tool. Comprehensible input should come to your students in many voices.

### **Look ahead in small pieces:**

- You know what your program has given your students. As you prepare to present the first few paragraphs, you will identify what your students know and what they need to know.
- Review any of the high frequency vocabulary and pre-teach any stumbling blocks. Relax, your students may surprise you!
- Plan how you are going to help that short bit of text be completely comprehensible to 100% of your students.
- Front load anything that will road-block, but only look at the immediate future, the next couple of days.
- Don't worry about anything beyond a couple of paragraphs day at first. That is the point of the novel. It teaches itself.

### **Explore the setting of the story:**

- Enjoy the unique opportunity to introduce and develop students' background knowledge about the geography, political and cultural context of the novel they are reading.
- Use this purposeful time spent exploring topics specific to the upcoming book, through music, film, and vivid online resources to bring the reality of the setting and characters to your students.
- Novels steeped in cultural context provide the invisible hook of human connection. Allow students to discover these real-life commonalities which build relationships with the characters in the story. "Teaching culture" is best done when least expected.

### **Begin and don't look back:**

- Teaching a whole-class novel, is just that. Teach it to the whole class. Stay together from start to end.
- Continually check comprehension and let the results plan your tomorrow.
- Remember that there is no good reason to dwell on the tense of verbs or other grammatical details in the text. Your only objective is to support comprehensibility and create CI.

### **Invite insightful conversation:**

- Encourage students to consider and communicate how their life relates to the characters or situations in the story emerge, allowing endless natural CI during the process.
- Take every detour to personalize topics, events and situations. Extend every page.
- Create your curriculum by expanding every piece of the book. It can be your focal point all term if you allow it.

- Personalize topics from the story. It can be as simple as conversation about likes /dislikes, clothing choices, food, gender roles, responsibilities, rights and values.

**Guide them to read deeply:**

- No one “knows what they don’t know”. Few students arrive equipped to read deeply enough to absorb everything offered in the text. That is not to say that they “don’t comprehend it”, simply that they are accustomed to reading superficially.
- Some students will take longer than others to realize that they really have to understand what they are reading. For many it is a new skill to read for complete comprehension.
- Use *frequent* comprehension checks to inform yourself of the best pace and manner in which you guide your students through the novel.

**Continually assess and adjust:**

- Remember to continually assess your students with frequent, short, sweet and simple comprehension checks.
- Remember that you are “assessing your students” to collect data to inform your teaching plan.
- Remember that you can toss it in the trash once you get the information that you need. Not everything must go in the gradebook!
- Remember that even after you have convinced most of them that you will assess their comprehension almost daily, if you back off, so will they.
- Remember that although you don’t put it all in the gradebook, some assessments need to have enough bite to convince the lazy readers to step it up.
- Remember that you don’t want your assessments to punish the struggling reader, but instead, to determine who is who, and who needs what.

**There are many ways to read a novel with the whole class.**

**The way that works for YOU is the right way.**

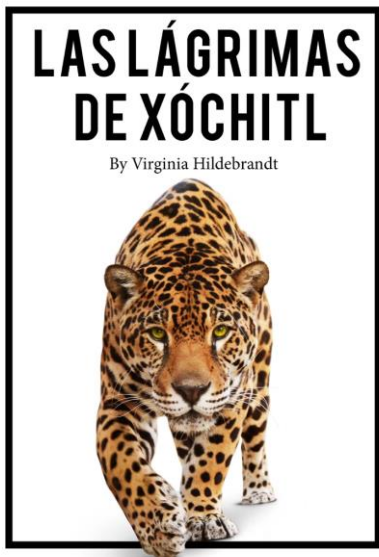
**Here is the way that works for me.**

I will be using the first paragraphs of my book *Las lágrimas de Xóchitl* as an example. This is just one example. There are many other CI novels that can be used. This book fits my level 2, 9<sup>th</sup> /10<sup>th</sup> grade class.

I would start reading it after about 4 weeks of class. During those initial weeks I would have been circling and reinforcing the high frequency vocabulary that I see coming up in the first few chapters and building classroom climate.

The story is set in a rural village in Guatemala. The main character is a 15-year-old indigenous girl who yearns to know about the world outside of her small town. The first two paragraphs describe her house and suggest a very simple lifestyle without modern amenities.

Before beginning the novel, I would have exposed my students to some interesting information about the geography and socio-economic reality of Guatemala.



## Capítulo Uno

Xóchitl tiene un secreto. En una casa tan pequeña es difícil tener un secreto. Hay dos cuartos en la casa; una cocina donde preparan la comida y comen, y un cuarto para dormir.

La cocina tiene una mesa y unas sillas donde se sientan para comer y hablar. La cocina es el lugar donde Xóchitl puede leer, estudiar o hacer las matemáticas porque hay luz. El otro cuarto no tiene luz. Es el cuarto para dormir, nada más. Toda la familia duerme en un cuarto, así es difícil tener un secreto.

*Las Lágrimas de Xóchitl*

**A PENSAR**

Capítulo

**1**

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_ Clase: \_\_\_\_\_

**Responde en español:**

1. ¿Cómo es tu hogar? ¿Vives en un apartamento o en una casa?
2. ¿Vives en la ciudad, en el campo o en las afueras?
3. ¿Compartes un dormitorio o tienes tu propio cuarto?
4. ¿Qué hay en la cocina donde vives? ¿Es una cocina moderna o rústica?
5. ¿Tienes responsabilidades en casa? ¿Cómo ayudas a tu familia?

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*Las Lágrimas de Xóchitl*

**A PENSAR**

Capítulo

**1**

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_ Clase: \_\_\_\_\_

**Answer in English:**

1. What is your home like? Do you live in a house or an apartment?
2. Do you live in the city, the country or in the suburbs?
3. Do you share a bedroom or do you have your own?
4. What is in the kitchen where you live? Is it modern or old?
5. Do you have responsibilities at home? What do you do to help your family?

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Before starting page one I will have done a lot of circling and personalized questions and answers (PQA) using **hay** (there is), **cuartos** (rooms), **duerme** (sleeps), **se sienta** (sits down), **puede** (can) and maybe **lugar** (a place). If new vocabulary is coming up, I might introduce those structures using gestures, circling and personalized questions.

The **A PENSAR** activities for each chapter are great to get students thinking about how their life relates to the characters or the story. I might use the English version in chapter one, to kick off the story to begin laying the foundation. There are certain situations where it is more valuable to allow students to process in English, but I am very selective about how when and why.



Images can be key to enhance comprehension during discussion. The digital color photos can stimulate conversation or simply reinforce meaning. I want to be sure not to proceed with new pieces of the text if there has been anything previously that was not completely understood by all students.

While teaching a novel, I almost always begin each day with a “warm-up” activity. Some people call them “bell-ringers”, whatever. These half sheet or short activities serves to kick off the lesson, get them all to sit down, get busy and offer a reminder of what we read or did yesterday. I control the books and offer them sometimes but not always during the warm-up, depending upon the activity.

For example, the day after reading the first page, I might ask students to jot down what they can say about Xóchitl’s house (without use of the book). Or, have them draw what they know about her house if they are not ready to write in Spanish. Then, they can compare drawings and ideas, grab a book and check.

Warm-ups are simple. It could be a direct replica of a paragraph of yesterday’s text in a fill in the blank model, with or without a word bank. Or, with an image on the screen, students could brainstorm everything they can think of that relates to the picture.

Later in the book, they could work in groups to list words that are mentioned in the story so far by topic: clothes, furniture, weather, family members, etc. Collect and talk about it... challenge the class to be sure answers are right. Pass out books to do that. Have them figure it out. Anything to get them interacting with what they read.

While reading, students keep an ongoing graphic organizer where they compile details that they learn about characters and places. When reading a chapter with a lot of action, students draw the sequence of events and supply key phrases that surround each situation.

Generally, I read *with* my students. I keep “everyone on the same page” and check for comprehension every couple of lines, asking questions and getting proof that all students understand. Rarely do we consume more than a couple of pages a day.

After I have convinced my students the importance of reading deeply, and they have convinced me that they are ready, the time comes to gently shift the way we read. At some point, but not too soon, we make the transition to small group reading.

While still working together as a class, I will teach them the ping-pong reading strategy. Guiding and teaching them the strategy that they will perform in their small group.



There are a number of ways to do ping-pong reading, and you will find what best suits your class. In general, one student reads a sentence or two out loud in Spanish, and the next student tells the group what it means in English. Then that student reads the next line in Spanish, and so forth.

Keep this activity short and often with a task that the group should complete and turn in. I require that students create a circle with their desks. The key is to maintain accountability, encourage groups to keep each other focused and to continue to check for comprehension.

As you monitor the room, listening to groups reading, I am always amazed at how well students monitor each other. This is also a good confidence builder as students realize that even with some independence, they continue to understand the text.

As you get further into the novel, your students’ skills will have improved and you will begin to feel the need to “switch it up”. Get creative and keep it fun! Don’t rush... extend everything! Change the seating to pairs, side by side. While reading out loud to their partner they must use attitudes like the character. Have a competition for the best character portrayal.

We all love manipulatives. Cut up and organize. Give them a list of quotes to categorize by character. Give them a list of short phrases to categorize by event, or correlate with a situation. My personal favorite is to ask students to create the categories to place phrases and isolated words. I really like this because it is interesting to watch their mental process. (They really want to be told the categories.)

\*Tip: require at least five categories and there cannot be “other” as a category. To get them started, suggest *emotions, places, luck, reality vs imagined...* the possibilities are endless. The audiobooks are an amazing resource that you can use in countless ways! Get set up so that you can pause and rewind often.



Always play short portions at a time.

When first introducing use of the audio, I ask students follow along in their book with their finger while listening. All hands on the book! Each student *must* be able to show me exactly where we are at every moment. Do it like musical chairs, stop the audio and ask them what word we are on. (Strangely enough, they love that “game”.)

Play short portions of the audiobook, with or without the text in hand. It is a great reminder of a chapter after a weekend and wonderfully refreshing to hear a voice other than mine!

- Just like while reading, you can play a short piece, pause, and check for comprehension.
- Just like while reading, you can play a short piece, pause, and discuss.
- Just like while reading, you can play a short piece, pause, draw, act or predict what will happen next.
- Just like while reading, students can write or draw to retell the segment they heard.

Play a short piece, while silent student actors portray what is happening, use props and costumes. This is a great option because no student output is required.

Las Lágrimas de Xochitl  
CH 1

14-0044

1. el cuarto  
2. la casa  
3. la cocina  
4. una mesa  
5. unas sillas  
6. la estufa  
7. luz

8. hambre  
9. comida  
10. tortillas  
11. frijoles

12. hermanos  
13. hermanitos  
14. hermanos menores  
15. hermano mayor

16. la vida  
17. el lugar  
18. el mundo  
19. el trabajo  
20. el campo  
21. la cabeza  
22. los senderos  
23. las revistas  
24. las calles

Las Lágrimas de Xochitl

VOCABULARIO

el cuarto	sobre	fuera
la casa	así	dentro
la cocina	más	después
una mesa	donde	tan
unas sillas	que	otro
la estufa	¿qué?	nada
luz	porque	toda
	cuando	también
	para	esta
	mientras	
	pero	despacio
		mastro
		cosas
		mucho
		pequeño

Las Lágrimas de Xochitl

Capítulo 1  
COGNADOS

<i>un secreto</i>	<i>fotos</i>
<i>difícil</i>	<i>información</i>
<i>familia</i>	<i>rápidamente</i>
<i>responsable</i>	<i>energía</i>
<i>responsabilidad</i>	<i>artículos</i>
<i>atención</i>	<i>serio</i>
<i>momento</i>	<i>interesante</i>
<i>americanas</i>	<i>límites</i>
<i>fascinada</i>	<i>suficiente</i>
<i>irresistibles</i>	<i>opción</i>
<i>inmediatamente</i>	<i>confundido</i>
	<i>completamente</i>
	<i>personas famosas</i>

## Las Lágrimas de Xóchitl

VIDEO



LIVING ON ONE

LIVING ON ONE.ORG

Video: *Living on One Dollar - Guatemala*  
Video shorts: *Change Series*

*Living On One* is a full-length documentary <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3gF3DPTCFA>

\*also found on Netflix

The documentary was made by four college students who traveled to rural Guatemala and dedicated themselves to the experience of living on just a dollar a day. They did an amazing job of filming the reality of the human experience and invite the viewer into this personal journey.

Upon their return, they published a series of video shorts and created *Living On One*, a nonprofit to raise awareness and inspire action around global issues like hunger and poverty.

The *Change Series* is a collection of short videos, perfect for the classroom. 12- 15 minute segments each focusing on a particular aspect of the poverty cycle. These are extremely well done, compelling and deliver a powerful message.

I highly recommend using this as your class reads the novel. I stumbled across these gems just after writing *Las Lágrimas de Xóchitl*. What a gift!

The documentary and/or series dove-tail perfectly into the background as students are reading the novel. Compelling and real the video helps students connect with some of the realities of rural poverty. I use the video shorts to enhance lessons and find that students build a stronger emotional connection with the novel when they see the videos.

There are a multitude of resources on the internet  
<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/film-festival-poverty-education-lessons>

## Las Lágrimas de Xóchitl

Capítulo

1

Comprensión: ¿Cierto o Falso?

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_ Clase: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_ Xóchitl vive en una casa pequeña.
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_ Xóchitl tiene muchas responsabilidades.
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_ Atzin es su hermano menor.
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_ Xóchitl le gusta mirar las revistas americanas.
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_ Atzin no tiene que trabajar.
- 6) \_\_\_\_\_ Xóchitl prepara el almuerzo hoy.
- 7) \_\_\_\_\_ Xóchitl se sienta en las revistas para cubrir el secreto.
- 8) \_\_\_\_\_ Atzin quiere leer las revistas.
- 9) \_\_\_\_\_ Los hermanitos juegan dentro de la casa.
- 10) \_\_\_\_\_ Elvia es la amiga de Atzin.
- 11) \_\_\_\_\_ Atzin necesita comer porque tiene que trabajar mucho.
- 12) \_\_\_\_\_ Xóchitl está contenta con su vida.

