



# The Booklist Project

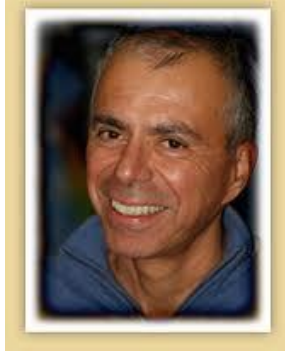


Focus: Culturally-Responsive Author Study  
Booklist

Gary Soto

Developed by: Karen Mangone

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## **Gary Soto - Author Study Book List**

**Grade Level : K-8**

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### **Biography**

Gary Soto is a Mexican-American author who writes picture books, chapter novels, short stories, biographies, and poetry for children and adults. Most of his writings are Bilingual and include a list of Spanish or Chicano (Mexican-American) words and phrases, with their English translations in a glossary. He has also written plays and memoirs and has edited several literary anthologies.

Gary was born April 12, 1952 in Fresno, California. His father died when he was just five years old and his family struggled to find work. In his youth, Gary worked in fields and factories and did not do well in school. However, in high school he loved to read classic novels and contemporary American poets. Additionally he discovered many Hispanic authors which he admired. While attending college at CSU, Fresno, Gary decided he wanted to become a writer. He earned a B.A. in English and then got a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. Presently he lives with his wife and daughter in Berkley, CA where he has been a Distinguished Professor at the University of California at Riverside.

A lot of his work is autobiographical because he writes about his experiences or memories growing up as a Mexican American in the "barrio" or neighborhood in California. Yet, the stories are realistic fiction with Hispanic characters. He also writes about the feelings and experiences shared by most American kids which makes his books popular among all children and helps them learn some Hispanic culture. Gary Soto is not only an avid writer, but he is also an avid reader.

## Official Website

On his official website, [www.garysoto.com](http://www.garysoto.com), Gary says, " It appears these days I don't have much of a life because my nose is often stuck in a book....I discovered that reading builds a life inside the mind. I enjoy biographies and novels and reading in Spanish."

Most importantly, anyone can look through the picture catalog arranged by genre and interest level to view the covers and descriptions of Gary's Books. Next, these titles can be ordered using the downloadable Soto & Friends order form. This website also has: a faq tab in which Gary shares personal information, a biography, a photo gallery, a museum (The Gary Soto Literary Museum opened at Fresno City College in February 2011) , a contact page, and information about his first e-novel, "When Dad Came Back" (available on Kindle through Amazon).

## Book List

**Bilingual Books** English/Spanish

### Picture Books K -2

1. Soto, G. (1993). *Too Many Tamales*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. [ISBN 0-590-22650-9]

This book is about a mother and daughter making tamales during the Christmas season. The daughter, Maria, loses her mother's ring while making them. Thinking the ring is in the tamales, Maria and her cousins try to find the ring by eating them. All students can relate to her funny predicament. Hispanic students can especially relate to the Christmas tradition of making and eating of tamales. Lessons on temptation and telling the truth can also be taught. The excellent illustrations, which show great emotion, add to this wonderful book.

WIDA Level: Beginning - Developing

Guided Reading Level : M

Interest Level: K-2

The book and following resources are available for teachers on [scholastic.com](http://scholastic.com):

*Too Many Tamales* Discussion Guide (Grades K-2)

*Too Many Tamales* Writing Prompt (Grades K-2)

This book is available in Spanish, *Qué Montón de Tamales! /Too Many Tamales* by Gary Soto, Translation by Alma Flor Ada and F. Isabel Campoy. Paperstar, 1996.

**Too Many Tamales** is available on video from <http://westonwoods.scholastic.com>

\*Available on digital audio books from [audible.com](http://audible.com) and as cassette from [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

2. Soto, G. (1996). ***The Old Man and His Door***. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. [0-399-22700-8]

This Bilingual picture book is great for a read aloud. The book is based on a Mexican song about how "el puerco" (the pig) and "la puerta" (the door) sound alike when you are old. This is a humorous story of an old man who thinks his wife tells him to bring a door (la puerta) to a fiesta, but she really told him to bring the pig (el puerco). Although the old man is late to the fiesta and does not want to anger his wife, he stops to help every person in need, using the door. It is a great book to show how if you pay attention to those around you, you can help each other. Also, it teaches how items can be used for other purposes. ELLs will relate to the Spanish expressions that are scattered throughout the book.

WIDA Level: Beginning

Guided Reading Level: L

Interest Level: K -2

3. Soto, G. (1997). ***Snapshots from the Wedding***. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. [ISBN 0-399-22808-X]

A flower girl, Maya, takes us through a wedding photo album telling the reader her thoughts and humorous memories of Isabel and Rafael's Mexican-American wedding and reception. The snapshots are really 3-D diorama scenes made with doll figures. Spanish words and Mexican-American culture is seen throughout the text which is great for ELLs. Also, all children will enjoy Maya's honest and humorous viewpoint. After reading this book, students can make their own photo albums and share their memories of cultural events.

WIDA Level: Expanding

Guided Reading Level: Q

Interest Level: K -2

4. Soto, Gary. (2000). ***Chato and the Party Animals***. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons. [ISBN 0-399-23159-5]

This is a story about friendship and community featuring two cats, Novio Boy, a poor cat from the pound and Chato, the coolest cat in the "barrio" (neighborhood). Chato plans a birthday party for Novio boy, forgets to invite him, and then can't find him. In the end, the cats enjoy their "pachanga" (festive party) together and become close family. Mexican-American terms are used throughout the story and Hispanic ELLs can identify with close friends becoming like brothers in their neighborhood. A glossary of terms is found in the front of the book for teachers. This is a good picture book for a read aloud and discussion about friendship.

WIDA Level: Developing - Expanding

Guided Reading: P

Interest Level: K - 2

The following resource is available for teachers on [scholastic.com](http://scholastic.com):

*Chato and the Party Animals* Discussion Guide (Grades K-2)

This book is also available in Spanish, ***Chato Y Los Amigos Pachangueros/Chato and the Party Animals*** by Gary Soto, Translation by Teresa Mlawer. Penguin Group USA [ISBN 0-14-240033-5]

\*Audio CD available in Spanish and English and on cassette at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

Also available in an audio/video collection with a study guide:

**CHATO'S KITCHEN AND OTHER STORIES FROM THE HISPANIC TRADITION PLAYAWAY® AUDIO** \* <http://westonwoods.scholastic.com>

### Chapter Novels Grades 3-5

5. Soto, G. (1992). ***The Skirt***. New York: Delacorte Press. [ISBN 978-0-385-30665-2]

In this heartwarming story the main character, Miata, has left the beautiful folklórico skirt her mother wore in Mexico on the bus. She was going to wear the skirt on Sunday when her dance group performed. Students can relate to the anxiety of losing something valuable. The skirt represents her Mexican culture. She is a great character because she is bilingual and loves both hot dogs and enchiladas. ELLs can relate to Miata wanting to honor her heritage and not wanting to lose it.

WIDA Level: Developing - Expanding

Guided Reading Level: N

Interest Level: Grades 4-7

\*Available on cassette or CD on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

6. Soto, G. (1987). ***The Cat's Meow***. Scholastic, Inc. (arrangement with Portland, Oregon: Strawberry Hill Press). [ISBN 0-590-47002-7]

In this story a young girl, Graciela, owns a very special cat, Pip, who can speak. But Pip only speaks Spanish. Throughout the story there are many Spanish words readers can learn using a

glossary that is conveniently provided at the bottom of each page. ELLs can be experts in helping other students pronounce these words correctly. This is a great guided reading book for a diverse classroom.

WIDA Level: Developing - Expanding

Guided Reading Level: N

Interest Level: Grades 3-5

### **Short Stories, Grades 4-8**

**7. Soto, G. (1993). *Local News*. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. [ISBN 0-15-248117-6]**

This book contains a collection of short stories, all highlighting small yet significant moments in the lives of 13 adolescents. It features interesting and memorable characters like, Angel, Estela, and Nacho from Mexican-American neighborhoods. Spanish words and phrases are scattered throughout these realistic stories. A glossary is found at the end of the book. These stories are good for ELL students because they can relate to the dialogue. Also, the stories are filled with emotions and situations that all kinds of youth regularly encounter. Additionally, the short length of the stories is helpful to ELLs.

WIDA Level: Expanding - Bridging

Guided Reading Level: W

Interest Level: Grades 6 -8

\*Available as a audio cassette and as a CD on amazon.com

**8. Soto, G. (1990). *Baseball in April and Other Stories*. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. [ISBN 0-15-202573-1]**

In this collection of short stories, the small events of daily life reveal big themes-love and friendship, youth and growing up, success and failure. These stories are about smart, tough, vulnerable kids growing up in California's Central Valley. Mexican-American students will be able to relate to the neighborhood, relationships, and dialogue. All students will relate to the joys and pains, dreams and desires of young people everywhere. Since this book has been translated in Spanish, it is extremely helpful for ELLs in retaining their ability to read Spanish text.

WIDA Level: Expanding

Guided Reading Level: U

Interest Level: Grades 6-8

This book is available in Spanish, *Béisbol en Abril y Otros Historias* by Gary Soto, Translated by Tedi López Mills. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993.

\*Audio CD Narrated by: Stephanie Diaz, Miguel Gongora from Audio Bookshelf, and as a cassette on amazon.com.

### **Poetry for Young Readers, Grades 3-8**

9. Soto, G. (1992). *Neighborhood Odes*. New York: Harcourt, Inc. [ISBN 0-15-256879-4]

This is a great collection of odes to ordinary things, written in language accessible to elementary and/or middle school students. This book would be useful in introducing poetry, especially to native Spanish speaking students, in that most of the vocabulary is fairly unintimidating. Many subjects are culturally specific for ELLs. Yet, many come from universal experiences like eating snow cones in the summer, family pictures and watching fireworks. A glossary is also available for translating the Spanish words. A great book for poetry read aloud and choral reading.

WIDA Level: Expanding

Guided Reading Level: NR

Interest Level: Grades 6-8

10. Soto, G. (1995). *Canto familiar*. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. [ISBN 0-15-200067-4]

This book contains twenty-five poems about the pleasures and woes that Mexican American children experience growing up. Some poems like "Spanish" and "Es Verdad" deal with pride and self esteem. Great for poetry read aloud and choral reading. These poems are fantastic for teaching figurative language. Gary Soto has a way of painting a picture, describing people, places, things, and feelings with specific words. By reading his poetry, ELLs will be inspired to improve their vocabulary and writing skills.

WIDA Level: Expanding

Guided Reading Level: NR

Interest Level: Grades 4-7

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A Project of the  
M.Ed. In TESL Program,



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