Maximilian and the Curse of the Fallen Angel

Author: Xavier Garza
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Pre-Reading Information

Synopsis: Continuing his lucha libre escapades, Maximilian, now fourteen years old, finds himself alongside his family in Mexico City for the summer after being given the chance to act in a film with uncle Tio Rodolfo, a lucha libre star. While there, Max learns that Tio Rodolfo is retiring from his acclaimed wrestling role as the Guardian Angel to pursue his marriage to the former luchadora, Silver Star. Confused and upset over his uncle’s decision to retire from lucha libre, Max, whose life has nearly always revolved around the expectation that he would replace the Guardian Angel when he is grown, wonders now who is to become the Guardian Angel’s successor. As the famous luchador’s final match to the vicious Fallen Angel approaches, Max grapples with some challenges facing his own future as heir to the Guardian Angel throne. Along the way, he gains unexpected wisdom not only about himself but also about others. Yet, the question remains: Who will continue the legacy of the Guardian Angel?

Interest Level: Ages 9-13, Grades 3-8

Curriculum Standards: A list of applicable Common Core standards appears at the end of this guide.

Themes: Lucha Libre, Accepting Change, Growing and Changing, Coming of Age, Overcoming Jealousy, Making Difficult Decisions, Sacrificing for One’s Dreams, Choosing Family/Love Over Career/Work, Continuing a Legacy

Content-specific Vocabulary:
- Luchador/a
- Match/lucha
- Opponent/oponente
- Leapfrog/brincar como rana
- Canvas/lona
- Cruiserweight/peso medio
- Hammerlock/candado
- Arm drag/jalón de brazo
- Clothesline/golpe con el interior del brazo
- Catapult/catapultar
- Turnbuckle/tensor
- Maneuver/maniobra
- Ruffian/rufian
- Rudo/a
- Technico/técnica/o
- Titan/titán
- Commentator/comentador
- Undercard/la misma cartelera
- Bout/contienda
- Prone (facedown)/bocabajo
- Gladiator/gladiador/a
- Successor/sucesor/a

Academic Vocabulary:
- Beseech/implorar
- Restore/devolver
- Fiend/demonio
- Infernal/infernal
- Stern/dura/o
- Accompany/acompañar
- Scholar/autoridad
- Colleague/colega
- Revelation/revelación
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**A note on vocabulary translation:** Spanish translations for English vocabulary words are provided based on translations within the story’s text in order to maintain the author’s original words and meanings, so literal translations might offer different definitions for some words and figurative language phrases.
Teacher considerations: There is mild violence featured, throughout, describing physical fighting/wrestling. There is no mature language.

Anticipation guide:

Previous books in the series

Maximilian and the Curse of the Fallen Angel is the fourth book in a bilingual (English and Spanish) middle grade series by Xavier Garza. Throughout the series, Max and his family live in Rio Grande City, a Texas town near McAllen, TX on the United States/Mexico border. Max travels to Mexico, to San Antonio, TX, and to other locations to watch Lucha Libre matches. Here are descriptions of the books preceding this one:

Maximilian & the Mystery of the Guardian Angel (Max's Lucha Libre Adventures #1)
Max’s summer vacation resembles one of his beloved lucha libre movies: grudge matches, fantastic villains and the Guardian Angel.

A Pura Belpré-winning bilingual cuento. Maximillian is just another 11 year-old lucha libre fan. He goes to the matches, watches the movies and collects the masks of his favorite wrestlers, especially the Guardian Angel. But when he tumbles over the railing at a lucha libre match in San Antonio, Max makes a connection to the world of Mexican wrestling that will ultimately link him—maybe by blood!—to the greatest hero of all time: the Guardian Angel.

What was shaping up to be one boring summer before 6th grade now seems like a story straight out of Max’s beloved lucha libre movies!

Book 2: Maximilian and Bingo Rematch

Everybody’s fighting in Maximilian’s world: a couple of cranky tías who, like lucha libre rudos, will stop at nothing to triumph in the church’s lotería game; his masked uncles going for the tag-team title of the world, and a green-eyed vixen named Paloma who challenges his love for Cecilia Cantú. Will good triumph over evil? Max sure hopes so!

Book 3: Maximilian and the Lucha Libre Club

The fights still rage on in the third installation of Max’s Lucha Libre Adventures series. Max seems like any other nerdy kid until he’s asked to join the Lucha Libre Club. The super-secret club admits only the offspring of wrestling royalty. And Max is a prince, descended through his mother from royal blood, his uncle the very king of lucha libre: The Guardian Angel. Trouble is, the club is so secret that Max can’t tell his best friend or girlfriend what he is up to. Just that vexing Paloma.
Lucha Libre Background

Author Xavier Garza grew up loving to watch lucha libre. Here is a brief nonfiction essay he wrote to provide students with background information. The essay first appeared in Lucha Libre: the Man in the Silver Mask, a picture book that could be used as a fun pre-novel read aloud.

LUCHA LIBRE: A Brief but Tremendously Exciting History

by Xavier Garza

EVEN BEFORE EL ENMASCARADO

Nuñez donned a crude black leather hood or La Maravilla Enmascarada—alias Cyclon Mackey—set foot inside a wrestling ring, people have been drawn to the allure of lucha libre and its masked men and women. Fans have come to view the masked wrestlers as symbols of power and mystery.

In Mexico, lucha libre is the poor man’s theater. For the price of a few pesos, the common man can treat his family to an incredible world filled with heroes and villains cast in leading and supporting roles. In lucha libre, individuals express themselves artistically, using their very own bodies and personalities as a canvas of sorts. They put on colorful—at times outrageous—costumes which enable them to become saints, devils, Aztec deities and other outlandish personalities. They touch upon our childhood fears, taking us back to a more innocent time when we believed that such creatures as vampires and werewolves actually walked the earth. They become defenders of all that is good, personifying even wrestling priests who preach the word of God even as they are dispensing divine justice with a clenched fist!

Lucha libre and its roots in Mexico can be traced back to the visionary efforts of Salvador Lutteroth Gonzalez. After running a successful family furniture business, he began promoting wrestling cards in what was then called La Arena Mexico, one of the first and most historically significant arenas in Mexico’s history. The Vince McMahon of his day, Lutteroth revolutionized the sport of lucha libre, turning what was once viewed as a mere side show into a spectacular extravaganza that depicted the constant struggle of good versus evil. Combining the visual with the dramatic, he created El Murciélago Velasquez (The Bat Velasquez), the first Mexican wrestler to ever wear a mask. Dressing him in a black hood with cutout silhouettes for his eyes, the vampire cape-wearing villain was a truly frightening sight. Unable to see anything but his eyes, lucha libre fans found themselves irresistibly drawn to this mysterious figure.

Who was he? Where did he come from? El Murciélago Velasquez, while a unique commodity at the time, wouldn’t be alone for long. Having captured the imagination of the lucha-libre-going public, Lutteroth followed up with adversaries who would do battle against this evil, masked ruffian. It was under Lutteroth’s watchful eyes that such legendary heroes and villains as The White Angel, The Blue Demon, The Red Devil, Mil Mascaras and Jalisco Lightning first came into being. And with Lutteroth as a mentor, a young man named Rodolfo Guzmán Huerta would go on to become the biggest lucha libre icon that the world has ever known.

HE WORE A SILVER MASK

In Mexico, the term “tener angel” is used to identify a person who has that special something which marks him out for greatness. Rodolfo Guzmán Huerta had “angel.” Just as Salvador Lutteroth Gonzalez revolutionized the sport of lucha libre, so the character created by Rodolfo Guzman Huerta revolutionized the way luchadores were perceived by the general public. The character that fans came to know as
Santo, El Enmascarado de Plata became firmly embedded in Mexican popular culture.

El Santo made his start on July 26, 1942. During a 51-year career, he defeated countless opponents, unmasking many of the greatest luchadores in lucha libre history. In 1951, nine years after his in-ring debut, El Santo became the principal character in a series of comic books that bore his name and image. It was because of these comic books that “Santo, the defender of the people” was born. Seven years later, the vast popularity of the Santo comics led their protagonist into another form of expression—Santo contra El Cerebro del Mal (“Santo versus The Evil Brain”), and Santo contra Los Infernales (“Santo versus The Infernal Men”) were among the first films Santo made in a movie career that spanned over 54 films.

As a movie star, El Santo reached iconic status in Mexico, winning the hearts of millions. Today, these films are viewed as cult classic b-films which captured both the innocence and foolishness of an era. Fans would rush to the theaters to see Rodolfo Guzmán Huerta don his famed silver mask so he could wage war against the forces of evil in its many shapes and forms. Werewolves, evil scientists, vampire women or invaders form the planet Mars—El Santo put them all down in defeat as his fans watched from the safety of their seats. Through these films, El Santo helped to give birth to a genre of lucha libre movies that formed a crucial part of the golden age of Mexican cinema.

El Santo’s life came to an abrupt end in 1984. His doctor told him that he was suffering from a severe heart condition that was both incurable and untreatable. Ever the showman and knowing his days were numbered, El Santo asked to be interviewed on live national television. During these interviews, he publicly unmasked himself, revealing to all of Mexico a secret identity and face he had protected for over 50 years. Only a few days later, he suffered a heart attack, fulfilling prophesies that were often made in his movies—El Santo without his mask would become a mere mortal like everybody else. El Santo’s funeral was televised and was open to the general public. Rodolfo Guzmán Herta, the man who was El Santo in life, was laid to rest wearing his famed silver mask.

Pre-Reading Activities and Questions

**Introduce Lucha Libre:** It will be important to introduce students to the background and practice of lucha libre at least to some degree before diving into the story. This can be accomplished by first posing questions to the students in order to determine their level of knowledge around lucha libre and to facilitate discussion: Have you heard of lucha libre? What do you know about lucha libre?

Then, brief background information can be shared about lucha libre, such as its history, cultural significance, characteristics, and popularity within certain geographical locations (see section in anticipation guide for some of these details). Videos, photos, and other resources can be used to facilitate introducing lucha libre and to activate background knowledge and/or inspire connections. Some students may be familiar with the movie Nacho Libre, so film clips from the movie can be used to get the discussion started, depending on students’ familiarity with the film.

Alternatively, students can work in small groups to “research” various components of lucha libre using informational texts, websites, or other sources, and then present their findings to the class as an introduction.

**Discuss the Genre:** Have students examine the book’s cover, illustrations, layout and ask: What genre do you think this book is? Why do you think so?

**Introduce the Setting:** Offer a brief introduction to Mexico City by exploring a map, and allow students to share any information they know or connections they might have to this location.

**Make Predictions:** Allow students to use illustration clues from the book and context to make predictions around what the story will be about.

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**Review Punctuation** (for bilingual learners): For Spanish-English bilingual students, it would be beneficial to point out the differences in the punctuation between the Spanish and English text. For example, quotation marks are not utilized to denote when characters speak in the Spanish text. Rather, em-dashes are used to indicate characters’ words. Also, students can notice the differences in the ways question marks and exclamation points are used for the English and Spanish text, such that the Spanish text places inverted question marks and exclamation points at the beginning of interrogative and exclamatory clauses, while the English text does not.

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Reading Activities and Questions

Though this book is relatively short, it will be important to stop during reading and provide inquiries for students to consider in order to elicit students’ responses and to promote connections and critical thinking. The following questions can be used as briefly posed prompts during reading, as well as in-depth writing and discussion prompts.

1. In chapter one when we are introduced to Tio Rodolfo, the text states he is “secretly” the Guardian Angel. Why does the author use the word “secretly” to describe Tio Rodolfo’s role as the Guardian Angel?

2. How would you describe the interactions between Max’s family members? What do you think this says about his family? Do any of these interactions remind you of your family? Why or why not?

3. Why is Tio Rodolfo retiring from lucha libre? How does he feel about retiring?

4. What are Max’s feelings about his uncle’s decision to retire? Why does he feel this way? Do these feelings change? How and/or why?
5. Who are the Guardian Angel’s possible successors? Who do you predict will become the successor?

6. Max acknowledges that he hadn’t considered that the Guardian Angel’s successor could be a woman. Why do you think he felt this way?

7. According to Tio Lalo, what is it like to be a luchador? Do you think all luchadores/as would agree?

8. How does the fight and discussion between Max and Maya change Max’s feelings about Maya and about Tio Rodolfo’s decision to retire?

9. Describe the interactions and fighting between the luchadores during the shows. Consider, are the encounters realistic? Are they acts? How do you know?

10. How does Max feel about his little brother, Robert, being involved in lucha libre? How do these feelings change throughout the story? What causes his feelings to change?

11. What does Max’s interaction with Spooky at the hotel reveal about his feelings and character?

12. How does the crowd respond to the Guardian Angel’s retirement? What does this say about the feelings his fans have toward him?

13. Following the Guardian Angel’s final fight, Max stands in the middle of the ring and holds the Guardian Angel’s mask in the air for the crowd to see. Why is this important?

14. How does lucha libre compare to other forms of fighting and wrestling that you know? (Students can create a Venn diagram to make comparisons.)

15. Think about Max’s character in the beginning of the story compared to his character at the end of the story. What has changed? Why?

Vocabulary: Several of the provided vocabulary terms’ meanings can be determined using context clues from the text. While reading passages with unknown vocabulary terms, guide students to stop and use clues to figure out words’ meanings. Students can even create their own lucha libre dictionaries, adding content specific words and their meanings as they go.

Figurative Language: This story offers several instances of figurative language use, so students can engage in language study activities focused on various types of figurative language such as hyperboles, metaphors, and idioms, among others. The following are some examples of figurative language from the book along with their Spanish translations (many of which differ from a literal translation but can be helpful to Spanish first language students):

- shrine to your ego/un santuario a tu ego
- worship the ground one walks on/venerar el suelo que pisa
- pearly whites/dientes brillantes
- getting cold feet/está sacando
- eagle eyes/ojos de águila
- in a league of their own/son singulares
- imitation is the sincerest form of flattery/la imitación es una forma de adulación
- the wheels turning in your head/los engranes de su cabeza dando vueltas
- go out in a blaze of glory/retirar
- a real doozy/una bastante buena
- making a mountain out of a molehill/ahogando en un vaso de agua
- in shambles/un desastre
- a walking encyclopedia/como una enciclopedia
- go macho/hacer el macho
- the elephant in the room/el elefante en el cuarto
After-Reading Activities and Questions

**Determine the Theme:** Students can work in small groups to determine an overarching theme from the story, and then defend why they chose this theme as the most salient by providing details and evidence from the text to support their determination.

**Lucha Libre Descriptive Writing:** Share with students a video of a lucha libre match (there are some videos available on YouTube), and then guide them to complete a descriptive writing activity. Model utilizing descriptions from fight scenes in the story (pp. 9-16; 63-67; 74-77; 126-129; 174-193), and then prompt students to use unique verbs, descriptive adjectives, and vivid examples in their writing. Questions to guide the activity might include: What do you see? What do you notice? How can you describe in detail what is going on?

**Web Quest:** Have students choose a topic of interest related to lucha libre and search the web for information about that topic. Students can then write and present their findings using a chosen format, such as a poster presentation, a pamphlet, or another creative display of choice. Some possible topics of interest could include lucha libre’s history, a famous luchador or luchadora, the significance of masks (and their designs) in lucha libre, as well as the various fight maneuvers.

**Creative Summative Activity:** As a final, creative task, students can create their own lucha libre character. They would need to:

1. Pick a name for their character. If they’re stuck, have them imagine where their character gets its power.
2. Design their character’s costume and mask. Both should be a good fit for the character’s name.
3. Decide if they are a rudo or a técnico. They can then make a poster describing their character using descriptive adjectives and/or figurative language.
4. Design and describe their character’s opponent.
5. Describe a “fight” between their character and her/his opponent. For initial guidance, students can revisit fight scenes from the story (pp. 9-16; 63-67; 74-77; 126-129; 174-193). They can write a short story or skit, make a stop-motion video with a voiceover, draw a comic, or use some other creative medium.

**Alternate Summative Activity:** Students can envision and write to predict who they think might carry on the Guardian Angel’s legacy and how this could be accomplished, or they can imagine one of the younger characters taking on the role of the Guardian Angel and write a narrative from that character’s perspective in the future. Encourage students to use descriptive words, lucha libre vocabulary, and/or figurative language in their writing.

**Interdisciplinary Connections:**

**Social Studies:** Lucha libre (history, culture). Mexico City (geography, culture).

**Art:** Students can design and/or create their own lucha libre masks utilizing a variety of mediums, such as paint, oils, clay, or papier mâché.

**Physical Education:** Students can learn and lead a lucha libre-themed workout.

**Math (Geometry):** Students can apply geometric principles to creating their own 3D wrestling rings from materials such as string, toothpicks, construction paper, clay models, or other supplies.

**Time (for younger learners):** Tio Lalo briefly discusses the busy life of a luchador/a in his conversation with Max on pages 58 and 59. Prompt students to think about what a day might look like for a luchador/a. Students can create a daily schedule of a luchador/a, specifying times for each activity and making estimations of intervals in minutes and hours. Then, students can create word problems based on their luchador/a’s schedule for their classmates to solve.
Additional books and resources to integrate:

Related books by the author, Xavier Garza:
- Maximilian and the Mystery of the Guardian Angel (2011)
- Maximilian and the Bingo Rematch (2013)
- Maximilian and the Lucha Libre Club (2016)
- The Great and Mighty Nikko (2015)

Websites about lucha libre:
- The Lucha Libre: A Brief History of Mexican Wrestling
- Lucha Libre: An Introduction to Mexican Wrestling
  https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/lucha-libre-an-introduction-to-mexican-wrestling

About the Author

Born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley, author and lucha libre aficionado Xavier Garza is a prolific and enthusiastic author, artist, and storyteller whose work focuses primarily on his experiences growing up in the small border town of Rio Grande City and is a lively documentation of the dreams, superstitions, and heroes in the bigger-than-life world of South Texas. Garza has exhibited his art and performed his stories in venues throughout Texas, Arizona and the state of Washington. He has authored and illustrated fourteen books, and has received such prestigious awards as the Americas Honor Book Award in 2005, the Tejas Star Book Award three times from 2007-2010 and the Pura Belpre Honor Book award in 2012. In 2014 he was awarded both the NAACS Tejas Young Adult Book Award and the Texas Institute of Letters Children’s Book Award. In 2019 Xavier Garza was inducted into the prestigious Texas Institute of Letters. Garza lives in San Antonio, Texas with his wife Irma and their teen son Vincent.

Reviews

“Garza shows a new mastery of his characters—all Mexican—and fictional world in this latest installment. Apart from Max’s continued growth, each character shines, no matter how small an appearance they may make. In the end, what readers get is an assured, joyous story full of lucha libre antics and poignant familial bonding…Max’s finest adventure thus far.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“This fourth series entry is another entertainingly pulpy, action-packed Lucha Libre–themed tale... Juicy subplots worthy of the best telenovelas are related with Tex-Mex linguistic flare, keeping the pace fast and the twists fresh.”

—Lettycia Terrones, The Horn Book
Common Core Anchor Standards

READING
Key Ideas and Details
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
Craft and Structure
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

WRITING
Text Types and Purposes
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.
Production and Distribution of Writing
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING
Comprehension and Collaboration
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

LANGUAGE
Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning
words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.