



Anna Meriano grew up in Houston, Texas, with an older brother and a younger brother but (tragically) no sisters. She graduated from Rice University with a degree in English and earned her MFA in creative writing with an emphasis in writing for children from the New School in New York. She has taught creative writing and high school English and works as a writing tutor. Anna likes reading, knitting, playing full-contact quidditch, and translating English song lyrics into Spanish and vice-versa. Her favorite baked goods are the kind that don't fly away before you eat them.



Leonora Logroño's family owns the most beloved bakery in Rose Hill, Texas, spending their days conjuring delicious cookies and cakes for any occasion. And no occasion is more important than the annual Día de los Muertos festival. Leo hopes that this might be the year that she gets to help prepare for the big celebration—but, once again, she is told she's too young. Sneaking out of school and down to the bakery, she discovers that her mother, aunt, and four older sisters have in fact been keeping a big secret: they're brujas—witches of Mexican ancestry—who pour a little bit of sweet magic into everything that they bake. Leo knows that she has magical ability as well and is more determined than ever to join the family business—even if she can't let her mama and hermanas know about it yet. And when her best friend, Caroline, has a problem that needs solving, Leo has the perfect opportunity to try out her craft. It's just one little spell, after all...what could possibly go wrong? Debut author Anna Meriano brings us the first book in a delightful new series filled to the brim with amor, azúcar, y magia.

Relevant Vocabulary:

- Middle-grade fiction
- Stages of Plot
- Day of the Dead
- Mexican bakery, family business
- Brujería
- Friendship
- Sisterhood
- Honesty

RRS connection to TEKS (4-5th grade): Please refer to TEKS for English Language Arts and Reading:

- **Comprehension skills:** listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts.
- **Response skills:** listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts.
- **Author's purpose and craft:** listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts.
- **Composition I:** listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--writing process.
- **Composition II:** listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts—genres.
- **Inquiry and research:** listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts.

Pre-reading reflection and dialogue:

- What does an author do?
- What does an editor do?
- Think about the title of this book? What does it tell us about the story? What do you think the story is about?
- What do you know about fiction, middle grade books? Talk to your librarian and ask her to show you more examples of this genre.
- Think about the author's use of Spanish in her storytelling. What do you think of this way of writing a story? How does this writing style make you feel?
- What do you know about fiction, middle grade books? Talk to your librarian and ask her to show you more examples of this genre. You can also explore Magic Realism.
- Look for information about Anna Meriano.

While-reading engagement:

Chapters 1-2-3:

The story begins in the Logroño home. Collaborate with your friends to create a character chart, you can also compare and contrast Halloween to Day of the Dead traditions. So much of Leo's life is revealed- pick something you learned about Leonora and think about possible endings to this story. What do you think will happen? Amor y Azucar is the family's bakery. Do you have a favorite bakery? Look for information about Rose Hill, Texas, where the story takes place. Make a drawing to talk to a friend about what you learned. Leo and her sisters ride the bus to school. Describe their bus ride to school. What happens next? Leo has a big plan, begin a timeline of events. You can also make a drawing of what happens in Chapter 3. ¿Qué es magia?

Chapters 4-5-6:

Why is Leo upset? What do you think her family is hiding from her? Is she really too little to know what happens in her family? What do you think? Use a Texas map to locate Rose Hill, Corpus Christi, and Austin. Don't forget to also look for the great Rio Grande Valley. The girls get ready for Day of the Dead...and Leo makes a great discovery at the end of Chapter 5. What does she discover? What does she find as she takes her investigation into the bakery's office?

Chapters 7-8-9:

Update your character chart and timeline to track Leo's new findings. You can also create a list of character traits for Leo. How do you think she feels? Write or draw a summary of what happens after Leo finds the recipe's for magic. Talk about magic and witches and compare this story to other stories about brujas. Do you like these stories or do they scare you? What type of brujería does the family practice? Invent your own magic spell! Compare the Day of the Dead festival in the story to one you've attended near your home. You can also ask your librarian to help you find more information about this Mexican tradition.

Chapters 10-11-12:

Why does Leo still feel upset? She prepared cinnamon rolls with her mom. Have you ever prepared a meal with someone at home? Or do you have a favorite dish? Write a recipe to share with your friends plus provide step by step instructions. Caroline and Leo have a special friendship. Make a drawing of your best friends. Leo has to use a Spanish-English dictionary to help her read the book of spells. Have you ever used this type of dictionary? Make a list of words in Spanish and translate them using a dictionary. Leo goes to Caroline's house after school. What do you think will happen next? Make a prediction. Do you think that Leo will show Caroline her "secret weapon?" What mystery power do you think Leo will have when she turns 15?

Chapters 13-14-15:

Leo's parents often call her, "Jita." Do you have a special nickname at home? Share this name with your friends if you feel comfortable. Don't forget to add Marcus and Marcellus to your character chart. What do you learn about them in Chapter 13. First spell, coming up! What spell are Leo and Caroline working on? Do you think this spell is a great idea or a bad idea? Mai and Tricia enter the story. Add them to your character chart plus update the story's timeline. Write a summary of Chapter 15. Why are Caroline and Leo so worried?

Chapters 16-17-18:

Did Brent eat the cookies? Do the kids at school join the Snack Club? Did the spell on Brent work? What was supposed to happen? What actually happened? It's time for magical damage control! Think about how Caroline and Leo can fix this problem...what should they do next?

Chapters 19-20-21:

What does Leo do next? It's Saturday and Leo has time to fix her mistake. What does she do? What ingredients does Leo have to collect for her next spell? What was happening to Brent at school? Should Leo and Caroline do something to help him? Write or draw the steps of the new spell. Do you think it will work this time? Oh no! What happens to Brent? What do Caroline and Leo do after they find out Brent is missing? Where do they find Brent?

Chapters 22-23-24:

What does Leo do in Chapter 22? Make a drawing of this chapter and include dialogue bubbles. Don't forget to update your timeline and begin to form an opinion about this book. What do you think? What do Brent and Leo do to make things better until the spell is fixed? What else do you think they should do? What would you do if you were in this kind of trouble?

Chapters 25-26-27:

Abuela to the rescue! Abuela describes all types of magic. Find more information about magic at your library. What's a bruja cocinera? Why do magic powers come until age 15? What happens during the initiation ceremony? What did Abuela tell Leo? What's the plan? How do her sisters help her? Don't forget to update your story timeline and predict what will happen next.

Chapters 28-29-30:

Make a prediction of how the story ends? What do you think will happen? Work in teams to think about several possible endings. Read the final pages of this book and think about the falling action and resolution. Are you happy with how the author ends the story?

Post-reading and wrap-up:

- Discuss the take-home message and form your own opinion. With your teacher's help, look for reviews of this book. For example, Publisher's Weekly and Kirkus Reviews. Do you agree or disagree with the reviews? Write, draw, or share your thoughts.
- Provide recommendations for future readers: Should other 4-5th graders read this book? What do you think?
- Make a welcome banner for Anna Meriano! Decorate it with photos and drawings of your favorite pan dulce.
- Prepare three questions you would like to ask Anna Meriano during her campus visit.

Useful links:

- Author's website: <https://www.annameriano.com/>
- Barnes & Nobles Interview: <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/kids/baking-brujas-interview-anna-meriano-love-sugar-magic-dash-trouble/>
- Kirkus review: <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-series/love-sugar-magic/>
- Interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-GA9N8IJ9cY>
- Austin Public Library Interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJ3M7taibE>