The Novel at a Glance

BACKGROUND
Lincoln Mendoza thinks of himself as Mexican American, or Chicano. His grandparents were born in Mexico. Most of his relatives have worked as agricultural laborers in the United States at some point in their lives, though they now hold more-diverse jobs. His mother works in an office, an uncle is employed as a mechanic, and another uncle is participating in a Latino comedy troupe. Lincoln’s awareness of his Chicano identity grows as he recognizes similarities and differences between his Japanese and American families. Lincoln must also re-evaluate his own cultural stereotypes as he learns that not all Japanese are technology professionals. In fact, many are hardworking laborers and farmers, similar in many ways to his own family members.

MAJOR CHARACTERS
Lincoln Mendoza, the main character, is a 14-year-old American teenager who travels to Japan.
Tony Contreras is Lincoln’s best friend who travels with him to Japan.
Mrs. Mendoza is Tony’s mother.
Mr. Ono is the father in Lincoln’s host family in Japan.
Mitsuo is the teenage son of Mr. Ono.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT
Read this passage from page 50 of the novel: “Hace mucho calor in this barrio. I thought Japan was near the North Pole. How come it’s so hot?”
This combination of two languages in one sentence is called code-switching and is often used by bilingual speakers, especially when conversing with others who speak both languages. Often, the context provided by the surrounding words is enough to help readers unfamiliar with the languages to understand what is being said. Use context clues when you encounter Spanish and Japanese words in the text.

Chapters 1–8
cállate, p. 9
moco, p. 11
karakoro, p. 29
gasshō, p. 41
ohayō, p. 58

Chapters 9–16
reflectively, p. 68
cavernous, p. 84
feigned, p. 102
guttural, p. 109
tirade, p. 117