



# Gringolandia

*Lyn Miller-Lachmann*

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Daniel's *papá*, Marcelo, used to play soccer, dance the *cueca*, and drive his kids to school in a beat-up green taxi—all while publishing an underground newspaper that exposed Chile's military regime. After *papá*'s arrest in 1980, Daniel's family fled to the United States. Now Daniel has a new life, playing guitar in a rock band and dating Courtney, a minister's daughter. He hopes to become a US citizen as soon as he turns eighteen.

When Daniel's father is released and rejoins his family, they see what five years of prison and torture have done to him. Marcelo is partially paralyzed, haunted by nightmares, and bitter about being exiled to "Gringolandia." Daniel worries that Courtney's scheme to start a bilingual human rights newspaper will rake up *papá*'s past and drive him further into alcohol abuse and self-destruction. Daniel dreams of a real father-son relationship, but he may have to give up everything simply to save his *papá*'s life.

This powerful coming-of-age story portrays an immigrant teen's struggle to reach his tortured father and find his place in the world.

## Gringolandia Details

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Author : Lyn Miller-Lachmann

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Historical, Historical Fiction, Cultural, Fiction, War, High School, Politics, Teen, Realistic Fiction

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## From Reader Review Gringolandia for online ebook

### Ari says

I love that this novel deals with the aftereffects of torture, not just on the victim, but on the victim's family. Daniel's father is hurt and he's determined to hurt those that he's loved. He's rude and spiteful to his wife, Daniel and Tina. I love Tina and I'm excited for the sequel told from her point of view. She's smart but there's definitely a lot more to her. She's twelve and barely remembers her father. She doesn't know what to make of her father in this changed state and she spends most of her time avoiding him. All the characters in the family have depth, there's more to them than their initial actions and there is a sense of satisfaction as the readers slowly learn more about the characters. I was also able to better appreciate the tidbits about South Americans. The Spanish people speak in Chile is different from the Spanish people speak in Central America. Also Daniel mentions that with his green eyes and brownish red hair, he looks different from the stereotype of Latino people (black hair, brown eyes), I appreciated that this is mentioned. South American culture is very different from Central American culture and that is not ignored.

I've always liked Daniel, but on this rereading I felt that Courtney was a little more understandable. I still don't like her, she doesn't really grow as a character, but I was able to better appreciate her good intentions, even if they were misguided. moving tale about a time and place that Americans know little about, Chile in the 1980s. The author does a great job of giving you an idea of what Chile was like during this time, the good and the bad. You may start off hating Daniel's father and how he treats his family or you may excuse it all together. The author skillfully shows that the situation is much more complex than that, you can't flat out hate or feel pity for Marcelo (and he definitely wouldn't want your pity). This trip to Chile is not particularly enjoyable, it's dark time in Chilean history but Daniel's family is wonderfully complex and there are some lighthearted moments. The novel is intense, but not absolutely horrific and you will be the better for reading it.

I'm looking forward to reading the sequel, My Life Divided, which is told from Tina's point of view

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### Lesley says

"The bigger the issue, the smaller you write."- Richard Price. We read for many reasons but one essential purpose is to learn about our world, including its history, and develop empathy for others. I found that, by teaching a social justice course through novels, my 8th graders learned about the effects of history on others, even others their age. @Lyn Miller-Lachmann's Gringolandia shares the story of HS student Daniel, a refugee from Chile's Pinochet regime, his activist "gringo" girlfriend Courtney, and Daniel's father who has just been released from years of torture in a Chilean prison and joins his family in Gringolandia. Spanning 1980-1991 this novel would be a valuable addition to a Social Justice or Social Studies curriculum or in my personal case, a good read to learn a history generally not covered in curriculum.

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### Teresa Scherping Moulton says

I liked this book but didn't love it. I really liked that it tackled the issue of the 1973 military coup in Chile because it's an event I knew almost nothing about before I studied abroad in college. However I'm not sure

this complex and controversial topic can be properly dealt with by a gringa (and I say that as a fellow gringa with an interest in Chile). I wasn't sure about the authenticity of some parts, and I think I'd rather read something similar written by a chilen@.

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## **Myles Parslow says**

The inside cover made this book seem intriguing, but after the first thirty or so pages it became a labor to even finish some of the poorly thought out sentences. The only reason that I finished this book is because I knew that I didn't have to give it a much undeserved good review. The concept of a father returning from years of torture under an oppressive regime in Chile could be fantastic if executed correctly, especially the reactions of the family that he is returning to. But what should be a smooth storyline instead ends up being a jolting experience, with three different points of view being ineptly handled.

The story starts out with the protagonist's (Daniel) father being taken away by the Chilean police, and subsequently his experiences in prison. These vignettes are where the author, Lyn Miller-Lachmann's writing skills show through. Sadly, the first dozen or so pages are definitely the high point of the novel. When Daniel's father, Marcelo, first arrives in the United States, the author's ineptitude is made apparent. I know the point of view is that of a teenager, but the interpretation of his thoughts do not have to be in the language of a teenager. This forced dumbing down also brings up the time period of the book, the mid 80's. In a decent book, the period in which the story takes place can be conveyed subconsciously, but "Gringolandia" is obnoxious in its explanation of the time. Instead of slipping in references, Daniel's listening to Aerosmith on his Walkman is obnoxious and completely ruins the flow of the book. This was not an isolated occurrence, but happened every 10 pages or so, probably being the deciding factor for how bad the book was. The storyline continues that Marcelo has become an alcoholic and is not a proper father, but Daniel is so unlikable that I find myself hoping that the father will leave and something will happen. Another problem with this book is how completely uneventful it is. The most suspenseful moment of the book has absolutely no buildup and involves Daniel in Chile with his father and his girlfriend throwing Molotov cocktails at soldiers, an action with no consequences and taking up about 3/4 of a page. Daniel and his girlfriend of a few years break up soon afterwards, a fact that I don't even notice until 4 pages after the fact due to the confusing writing style of the book. I was originally going to write a summary, but the storyline is so uneventful that I found it easier to just tear apart the details. 1/5 would not recommend unless you are incredibly interested in Chilean history, and even then there are far better options for reading

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## **April says**

Imagine waking up to soldiers in the middle of the night. Your father is dragged off and you don't know if you will ever see him again. A few years down the line, you have perfectly adjusted to a new life, when you find out your father is released from the prison he was placed in. If these things happen to you, chances are you are a character named Daniel in a book called Gringolandia.

Gringolandia takes place during the magical 80s. Turns out, 80s wasn't all great tv, movies and music. Actual things were happening in the world such as the Chilean revolution. What happened is the Chileans elected a socialist person to power. The US was like, no way bro, and totally killed the socialist and instituted a dictator in power. The Chileans were all, we don't like this! And people rebelled and fought for freedom. Daniel, who is the main character, has a freedom fighter father, who was TORTURED in jail. So his dad, understandably is messed up by that. Oh, and I forgot to mention, Daniel and his family now live in the

United States.

I thought Gringolandia worked on several different levels. Characterization was tight. See, Daniel was layered. His dad is layered. OH and he has this girlfriend, Courtney, who sort of forced me to confront these ridiculous ideas I had. I'm not gonna lie, I thought Courtney was so annoying, because she was all trying to do annoying things like write a social justice newspaper and ask Daniel's dad these probing questions for her newspaper. Then she gets herself into these dangerous situations. But then I thought, self, would you be annoyed if she was a male? Or would you just think her very courageous? I like it when a book makes me consider my brainwaves.

As historical fiction, I thought Gringolandia was both absorbing and informative. I don't know much about the Chilean revolution except when Howard Zinn mentioned it in A People's History of the United States. I do think getting a teenager's perspective made the learning much more engaging. The teenager wasn't one of those fake ones either, you know, when the character seems contrived. I liked that the history was part of the story, but not the whole story.

The next layer which worked especially well was the family relationships. What I love here is just how complicated the relationships are. I don't know if I'm weird, but my relationship with my family is complicated. I love my family, but they do some very annoying things and I do very annoying things. Well, the way Daniel's father relates to his family is multilayered. On the one hand, he cares for his family. On the other, he is so messed up from being tortured, all he can think about is Chile and going back. Plus, he's dealing with all of these other problems. I won't go too in-depth, so as not to spoil.

In a nutshell, I found myself compelled during Gringolandia.

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## **Natasha Walker says**

Title of book: Gringolandia

Author of book: Lyn Miller-Lachmann

Review: The book Gringolandia by Lyn Miller-Lachmann is an eye-opening read about Chile's military regime and how many families it affected and tore apart. Set in the 80's it focuses on a family whose father, Marcelo, is an underground newspaper publisher in Chile. He exposes military leaders and politicians but is caught one night and thrown in jail. He has to live through horrible conditions while the rest of his family is forced to move to America. They do everything they can to get him back and even though after several years they succeed, he has changed drastically with his time in prison. The family struggles with Marcelo's alcohol abuse, his constant nightmares and other side effects of prison all while trying adjust him to this new culture and to go on with their lives as they have settled into America.

This book is very interesting especially as it is a realistic fiction novel. Simply knowing that, the novel holds much more weight and is much more surreal. Miller-Lachmann does a good job of smoothly bridging the gap between the two cultures (Chile and America) and explaining the struggles Latinx immigrants have in America while also explaining how some Americans feel about immigrants. It is also worth noting that it is a very open, harsh critique of Pinochet's regime in Chile that is cutting, concise and sophisticated. It was interesting for me to read as a Spanish-speaker because although I am almost fluent I don't know very much about Latinx culture or immigrant culture. All in all, it is an interesting novel and a good read.

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## **Lawral says**

Gringolandia opens with an Author's Note explaining the very real circumstances and events in Chile that lead up to what is experienced by the fictional characters in the book. A short bibliography for further reading is also provided. Usually this kind of thing goes at the end of the story when readers are more likely to be interested in picking up 4-5 books on the topic. I thought it was a weird choice to put the note and bibliography at the beginning...until I started reading. Miller-Lachmann expects a lot of her readers, in a good way. She expects her readers to know what she's talking about without having to step away from the story to explain it, hence the need for the author's note preceding the story.

Because, let's be honest, not many Americans know that much about Chile and certainly don't know that much about what it was like to live through the turbulent times Dan and his family live through. I don't read a lot of historical fiction about specific events, but much of the historical fiction published in the States of this type is about very well-known events. Even if the average American reader doesn't know the ins and outs of the actual event, they know the basics. Think about how much historical fiction is set during WWII or the French Revolution, or is about Anastasia Romanova. Gringolandia fills a huge gap. I can't think of any other historical fiction for teen readers about South America, let alone about Chile.

Even if there were tons of titles about political prisoners under Pinochet, I think that Gringolandia would still stand out. Without repeating events, this story is told from three distinctive points of view: Dan's, his father's, and his girlfriend's. Dan's father, Marcelo, talks about what it was like in prison (and believe me, even the polite version presented here can get graphic), but the strong point in his narrative is his passion for a free Chile. He doesn't regret the actions he took that led to his arrest; he desperately wants to continue that work, regardless of the consequences, now that he's been released. He's also going through some serious PTSD that is tearing his family apart. His perspective is contrasted with Dan's. Dan doesn't really know what his father did (you can't be questioned about what you don't know), and he doesn't understand how his father could put himself and his family at such great risk for a cause. He certainly can't understand why his father doesn't want to just move on and make the best of things. Like his father, Dan has trust issues and a serious flinch in the face of policemen, but without the conviction that helps his father work through these issues. Courtney, Dan's girlfriend, is all fired up about what happened to Marcelo and what is happening in Chile in general, but she is also woefully naive. Courtney breaks through to Marcelo when no one else can by believing whole-heartedly in what he believes in, guided by a simple sense of right and wrong and of fairness.

There is so much going on in this book along side of so much actually happening. I'm not going to lie, it's intense and not always easy to read. But it is so worth it! Not only will the reader learn about events not often discussed in American history classes, but they'll also get to know some ridiculously complex characters and watch them make impossible choices for themselves and the greater good.

Book source: Philly Free Library

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## **Medeia Sharif says**

Gringolandia is a powerhouse of an emotional novel. From the beginning to the very end I was on edge for Daniel and his family. This is also a unique novel as I can't recall ever reading about political persecution in

South America and its effects on a family. It's an amazing book both for the story and the topics it explores.

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### **Bronwyn says**

I enjoyed this book mostly due to its subject matter and the fact that more Americans should know about Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile. The American girlfriend got annoying/intrusive at times and I guess I would've liked less attention paid to her and more on the relationship between Daniel and his father.

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### **Audrey F says**

I was very interested in the premise of Gringolandia, by Lyn Miller-Lachmann. The synopsis drew me in, and I was excited to begin reading. This book did not completely live up to my expectations. However, there were still many things done well in Gringolandia.

This novel is a historical fiction following teenager Daniel, a Chilean by birth living with his mother and sister in the United States in the 80s. His world is turned upside down when his father, an ex-freedom fighter, is released from Chilean prison after many years and joins his family in the United States. Daniel's father, Marcelo, has not been unchanged by his experiences of torture in prison, and has a hard time adjusting to "gringolandia", as he calls it, or land of the white people. On top of this, Daniel's girlfriend Courtney is passionate about helping Marcelo continue his fight for Chilean freedom from the United States. Daniel finds himself becoming more and more involved, against his will.

I thought the general plot of Gringolandia had a lot of potential. The story of a tortured freedom fighter continuing his struggle after his ordeal in prison was very moving, and I thought it was interesting how it was told from his teenage son's point of view. The story felt very real. It did not spare any details as to the acts of torture Marcelo endured, or the negative repercussions he suffered after leaving prison. I liked this about the story because of the realistic feeling it creating. Also, the book was definitely a sort of coming of age story for Daniel. His father returning from prison forces him leave behind his worry free life and come to terms with his past and his origins.

What I didn't like about this book was that the actual plot. The events that actually occurred were boring, and I thought the story could've been written in a much more creative way. I loved the idea of a teenage boy reconnecting with his father after his years in prison, but the actual storyline was not executed well. I also think certain things could've been explained better. I found myself confused and completely lost in many conversations that occurred between characters, and that affected my overall understanding of the story.

The idea for Gringolandia was original and touching. However, I believe if it had been executed better, I would have enjoyed it significantly more.

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### **Ms. Przybylski says**

I give this book a 3 (BUT SARA! YOU MARKED IT FOUR!) as far as my personal enjoyment goes, but I enjoyed the read and would recommend it to my students (the more mature ones, at least). What starts out as

a typical YA novel about a refugee/immigrant family suddenly morphs into an international adventure (sort of) story. It's kinda cool (hence the 3 that is sort of a 4).

I found the whole thing implausible, but then again, (a) I'm a 40 year-old woman with an overblown sense of "an 18 year-old preacher's kid from Madison can just secure fake passports?!?!!" and (b) I really don't know how common it was during Pinochet's regime for people to just sneak back in and do stuff. Maybe I'm off there, I don't know.

I mean, I love this book for its personal connections... Wisconsin (oh hey, I'm here), Chile (oh hey, family members from there), and, sadly, left-right political divisions that pull a country apart (I mean, we're not there YET).

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## **Jennifer Wardrip says**

Reviewed by Allison Fraclose for TeensReadToo.com

On October 23, 1980, 12-year-old Daniel Aguilar awoke to a crash and his mother's screams from the living room of his family's apartment in Santiago, Chile. When the young boy got out of bed, soldiers held a gun to his head until his mother told them where his father was hiding.

For this reason, Daniel always blamed himself for his father's arrest. If not for him, then Marcelo Aguilar, AKA "Nino" and writer for the underground newspaper Justicia, would not have been sent to prison to endure years of torture at the hands of dictator Pinochet's cruel regime.

Six years later, Daniel and the rest of his family anxiously await his father's release to their new home in Madison, Wisconsin. Now a junior in high school, Daniel has adjusted well to life in the United States, playing guitar with his band and for the church that his girlfriend Courtney's father runs.

An extensive letter-writing campaign has finally freed Marcelo, who now joins them in exile in "Gringolandia," away from his compatriots who still suffer and die on the streets and in the prisons of Chile. Although Daniel wishes for a close relationship with the hero father he's admired all of these years, he and his family could never have prepared themselves for dealing with the man who bears more scars than his broken body can show.

As Marcelo wrestles with his own internal conflict and spirals into a pit of self-destruction, Courtney takes it upon herself to rescue him in any way, and makes it her personal mission to bring Marcelo's cause to the ears of anyone who will listen. But, for Daniel, it's not all about his father's cause, and he may end up risking everything just to set things right in his own world.

This politically charged novel brings a powerful twist of humanity to the stories that most Americans simply read about in the news. The aftermath and reconciliation of Marcelo's horrific experiences feel very real, and the effects that they have on the rest of the novel's characters can be quite unexpected at times, making the reader anxious to learn of the outcome.

I must note that readers with a weak stomach may find it hard to make it through this book, simply for the descriptions of grisly torture techniques and the resulting physical and emotional scars they leave on their victims.



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## Katrina says

Gringolandia isn't a story easily forgotten, and it shouldn't be. As an adult with a Master's degree in Latin American Studies, the practice of torturing and disappearing political dissidents as a means of social control during violent dictatorships wasn't new to me. Yet I was still gripped by the novel, finding myself thinking about it days after I'd finished it. For young adult readers I think Gringolandia would be an incredibly powerful and moving book. Not only does it give voice to a historical period in a country not often taught about in the classroom, but I believe it also asks readers to think quite deeply about how we determine what is right or wrong and how we judge and make sense of the world around us.

The story is largely told from Daniel's point of view, with alternating shorter sections told from the point of view of Daniel's father, Marcelo, and Daniel's girlfriend, Courtney. It begins in 1986 in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship when Marcelo is beaten and arrested in the middle of the night in front of Daniel and his mother. The next section describes the torture Marcelo endured during the following six years of his imprisonment. The remaining bulk of the book covers the period six years later, when Marcelo is released and reunited with his family who fled to the United States after his arrest. Not surprisingly, everyone has changed during those six years. Daniel's father has been irreparably scarred both physically and emotionally by the torture. Daniel has adapted quite well to life in the United States, to the seeming disappointment of his father, who critically refers to the U.S. as Gringolandia.

Daniel, his mother, his father, and his sister must learn what it means to be a family again. As I watched them struggle through this, I found myself asking, what does it mean to be family? What will we do for family? Often times our students have these idealized versions of what family should be, and when theirs don't measure up they don't feel comfortable sharing their struggles, thus creating a vast disconnect between school and home. If Daniel hoped that everything would go back to the way it was before, he soon finds this isn't the case. Instead, he struggles to deal with a father who has become distant and angry, who turns to alcohol as a means of dealing with the torture that has permanently damaged him. My hope is that as students read, the space will be opened for them to share their own experiences.

Daniel seems to have successfully adapted to the U.S. He does well in school, plays in a rock band, and has a white girlfriend. As he watches his father suffer, he can't believe his father talks of returning to Chile after all that was done to him. One of the more powerful aspects of the book is watching as Daniel deals with the inner turmoil of his feelings towards his father. Part of him blames his father for choosing the actions that led to his torture and his family's exile, while part of him wants to be proud of his father's work, as so many others are. We're forced to consider the question, how do we determine what is the right thing to do? Or, as the book cover asks, "When history calls your name, how will you answer?" Fruitful discussion could come from asking students these questions. Daniel's relationship with his father is closely tied to his relationship with his home country, Chile. He must come to terms with this own identity, and decide who he is.

Part of the power of the book lies in the variety of themes it raises. While there may be many quality books that look at family relations, alcoholism, or civic duty, I think Gringolandia is one of the most powerful books I've read that delves into those and explores both political refugeeism and torture. As I read the section that described Marcelo's torture, I couldn't help but be reminded of Zero Dark Thirty, the movie about the hunt for and assassination of Osama bin Laden that received so much publicity last year. I'm sure many of our students have also seen the movie. I'd be interested to hear their thoughts on torture after viewing the film, and then after reading Gringolandia—my guess is many would struggle to make sense of their differing responses to each. I believe this is part of what makes the story so gripping—it forces our

students out of a black and white, clear cut understanding of the world, and makes them deal with those grey areas—Is torture ever okay? Can it ever be condoned? Why?

I couldn't agree more with the following from Horn Book: "Miller-Lachmann credits teen readers with the capacity to appreciate hard truths about international politics, the consequences of torture, complex family dynamics, and first loves....the nuanced relationship between Daniel and his father is beautifully delineated, and the overarching exploration of injustice and its costs gives the novel memorable heft."

I'm not alone in thinking Gringolandia is a worthwhile read--it's received recognition from a variety of organizations as the 2010 ALA Best Books for Young Adults, the 2010 Bank Street College of Education Best Children's Books of 2010, a 2010 Américas Award Honor Book, and a IPPY Gold Medal. I hope you'll consider adding it to your classroom library.

Find our free Educator's Guide here: <http://teachinglatinamericathroughlit...>

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### **Maggie Desmond-O'Brien says**

This book. Is. Amazing! Subtle character development, dialogue peppered with chileno slang and a powerful, moving plot makes for a book that plays like an indie movie on a screen for me. Like Rabbit-Proof Fence and other stories of politics at less than their best, Gringolandia blends the microcosm and the macrocosm, Dan's story with Chile's; with short, gritty description and a beautiful ending.

Like said indie movies, though, I can't see it getting the readers it deserves. First of all, it fits less than perfectly into a niche; lost somewhere between YA and adult, literary and mainstream. And secondly, the long Spanish passages and strong cultural flavor might turn off a casual reader. I've spent the past six summers at a Spanish immersion camp where many of the counselors are from Chile and Argentina, so I held my own for most of the book, but occasionally I knew stuff was going over my head, and it was frustrating.

But if you can get past that, which I really hope a lot of people can, then what you find is an incredible, moving story that was not at all what I expected. I found Dan and Courtney's relationship particularly interesting and very, very real, somehow a metaphor for Danielo's relationship with his country of birth. And the political slur gringo (used in much of South America, referring to clueless Americans) took on a whole new, less offensive meaning in this novel, exploring Dan's relationship with himself - a chileno boy dating a pretty gringa, according to his father, almost as bad as a gringo himself.

All in all, if you can understand the politics, you'll enjoy this incredible novel from an incredible author - one I hope to read more from in years to come!

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### **Vamos a Leer says**

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during violent dictatorships wasn't new to me. Yet I was still gripped by the novel, finding myself thinking about it days after I'd finished it. For young adult readers I think *Gringolandia* would be an incredibly powerful and moving book. Not only does it give voice to a historical period in a country not often taught about in the classroom, but I believe it also asks readers to think quite deeply about how we determine what is right or wrong and how we judge and make sense of the world around us.

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