

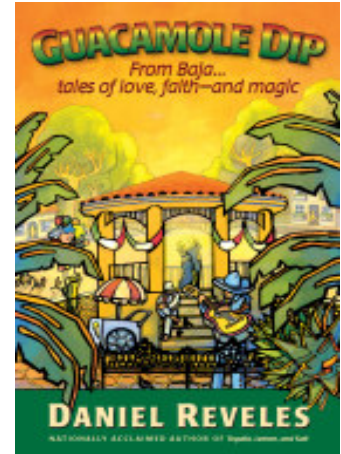
# Book Club and Reading Group Guide:

## Guacamole Dip

From Baja...tales of love, faith—and magic

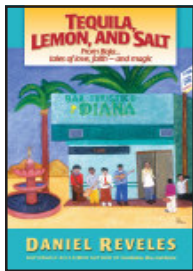
by Daniel Reveles

Daniel Reveles brings another helping of stories to the table—smooth yet spicy, and bursting with colorful characters. Against a backdrop of life in the border town of Tecate, Reveles offers us glimpses of young lovers and old friends, fierce rivals and friendly conspirators, a few familiar faces and plenty of newcomers. Their lives are peppered with intrigue and heart-breaking surprises, but even the most poignant tales are liberally flavored with the author's wry wisdom and zesty humor.



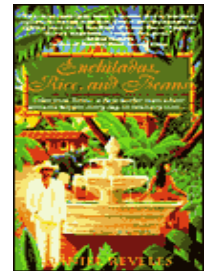
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Reveles' previous books, including *Tequila, Lemon, and Salt* and *Enchiladas, Rice, and Beans*, are popular with book clubs and library groups across the country and he enjoys a diversified audience of readers young and old.



5½" x 8½", 276 pages  
978-0-345-38426-3  
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Born in Los Angeles to Mexican-born parents, Daniel Reveles has been in some part of the entertainment industry since he was seventeen—as a recording artist, songwriter, television producer, documentary film director, and disc jockey. He stumbled into the Baja California border town of Tecate almost thirty years ago, and has been there ever since. Reveles lives and writes in the company of coyotes on a ranch on the outskirts of Tecate, and recently published his fourth collection of stories, *Guacamole Dip*.

Reveles, who moved to Baja California from Los Angeles over twenty years ago, has a pointed and often humorous outlook on many types of borders—such as racial and gender divisions and the serious rifts between classes and religions. His books have garnered both critical acclaim and a number of national and regional honors, including a ForeWord Book-of-the-Year Award in Short Fiction and the prestigious Theodore Geisel award in 2005.

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## Questions to Stimulate Discussion:

1. Reveles picked “Rain” a rather sad, though ultimately uplifting, tale about two women’s shared destiny to open *Guacamole Dip*. Do you think this was the best story to start with? Which other story would you have chosen to open or close the book?

2. “The Doughnut Man” has some obvious autobiographical elements in it—the narrator makes his living shooting commercials up in Los Angeles while living most of the time in Tecate, as Reveles did for years—are these settings a bit jarring when juxtaposed with the slower, more peaceful life of the border town?

3. “Jesus Rosencranz” is a very different kind of story for Reveles—what are the obvious differences and similarities between this and his other stories? What influences came from literature and cinema history?

4. The young lovers in “One Cappuccino and A Kiss to Go” and “Stolen Property” are similar, but the stories end so very differently—what makes the two plots alike? What is dissimilar about the two leading ladies?

5. What, if anything, did you learn about life in Mexico from reading this book? Do you feel like you got a glimpse of another world or was it very close to your experiences in own life, only in a foreign setting?

6. Were you bothered by the poverty of some people and the disparities between rich and poor? Is being poor less of a hardship for poor Mexicans because they are accustomed to it? Are the richest Mexicans poorer than the rest of the world’s elite citizens?

7. What about Paco in “Senor Frog”—he’s quite rich, but ends up with realizing that pretending to be poor has made him rich in love—do you know anyone like him? How likely is it that this Shakespearean plot would work out so well in real life?

8. Reveles point out many differences between Latino and Anglo attitudes and society, like the way Mexicans feel about capital punishment, politics, and premarital sex. Do you think their “family values” are stronger or simply different?



9. What do you think about the book's magical events? Do you believe that the witchcraft actually killed Adrian? Or that the two pieces of hidden *brujeria* in "El Secreto" actually ensured the characters long and happy marriage?

10. It's easy to forget that these stories are fiction. Why is this? How does the author make the characters and situations feel so real?

11. The men who make up the Cafeteros seem to cover every subject known to man each day over coffee. How come the author doesn't show a group of local women that meet to talk each day?

12. How does your own culture and family compare with the people you read about here? If your family members or friends are of non-American ethnicity, how does it compare to the families and friends in these stories? (If your family or friends are Mexican or Latino, how real did these characters seem to your experience?)

13. Many Mexican people practice religious practices that are a combination of Catholic, Indian, and mestizo/creole beliefs with mysticism and even "black magic" thrown in. Do you find it strange to see people employing parts of an established religion, like Catholicism, mixed with pagan beliefs?

14. Did you feel you had trouble following plot lines and understanding key plot points without knowing more about Mexican culture and superstitions? How about language—did the author use too few or too many Spanish words and phrases in this book?

15. Which of the town's many colorful characters did you relate to the most? Who was hardest for you to believe in or to like?

## Excerpt from *Guacamole Dip*

### *Aperitivo*

**I'm so glad you could make it down to Tecate today. Let's take a shady bench here in the plaza and watch a live show as good as any musical you'll see on Broadway. Our plaza is the stage where the everyday drama of life in Tecate unfolds. Mariachis, wandering musicians, singing pushcart vendors, and the steam whistle at the brewery provide the music. Costume and choreography are pure improvisation. I have a lot of new people I want you to meet and I'll tell you their stories--stories of love, and faith, and witchcraft. You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll make new friends, but, fair warning, you might leave behind a piece of your heart. Of course, some of your old friends are back. Look! There's Peter Lorre. Well, okay, it's really Trinidad Contreras, our Peter Lorre look-alike. Treenie is a certified state-licensed matchmaker. In adherence to Truth, I should add that Treenie is a certified state-licensed anything you need him to be for a fee. That frightful little gnome walking toward the kiosk is La Cucha. It's said that she lives under the bridge near the Padre Kino School and snatches away little children. I hope it's a joke. La Cucha is Tecate's news satellite. She sees everything, hears everything, assumes everything, then disseminates it all over town. If she comes by our bench we'll be on the evening edition. There's the Sno-Cone man. The whole town knows his deep dark secret. But nobody's telling! Glance over at the man with a guitar in his lap getting his shoes shined. That's Antonio, Tecate's favorite balladeer. I'll make sure he sings a couple of songs for you while you're here. The dark man buffing his shoes is Cepillos. Now, Cepillos is not your ordinary shoeshine man because nothing in Tecate is ordinary—he's a forensic scientist. In Tecate what you see is not necessarily what you see.**

**Pay no attention to that huge cloud of black smoke. It's not a terrorist. That's Father Ruben's pickup pulling into the church parking lot. The Padre is always running a little late. You'll meet him later and you'll like him immediately. That pretty girl in the backless turquoise dress? That's Señorita X. No, she's not a story, but you'll meet her later. Of course, we'll stop in for coffee with Los Cafeteros, Tecate's Chamber of Deputies that convenes every morning at La Fonda over a pot of coffee and drafts legislation for Vicente Fox, and El Boosh. By their second pot they turn profound**

**and deal with heavy questions like, can we love too much? I've often been accused by critics of being the natural enemy of truth. But the charge is an injustice. Tecate lives in its own reality. Those of you who have read my previous chronicles of Tecate are not likely to arch an eyebrow in an expression of disbelief when El Shorty comes riding into town on a big black and white Holstein cow that backfires. I can solemnly swear on my margarita that I write only what I see and what I hear.**

**The people you're about to meet on the following pages are not digitally enhanced characters invented just to make them entertaining. Their reality may not be your reality, but they're all real Mexicanos, people I see and talk to every day, people you would meet yourself if you took a shady bench in the plaza, sipped a margarita at the Diana, or strolled into the marketplace and ordered a love potion or boy-repellent from the *curandera* or sought the services of one of our local witches, purveyors of spells and curses. That's Tecate. As to witches, when I first arrived in Tecate I questioned everything. Twenty-five years later I still question everything but I doubt nothing. There must be a reason why the *botanicas* always sell out of *ojo de venado*, a powerful amulet that immunizes against *brujeria*. Do I have one? Yes! Do I wear it around my neck? No. It hangs on the computer!**

**Like any responsible author, I believe in full disclosure. The author is not responsible for convulsions of laughter, pernicious yawning or soggy handkerchiefs. If you suffer from nervousness, dyspepsia or hives, consult your medical professional before you continue reading. If you are pregnant or presently nursing, limit your dosage to one story in a twenty-four-hour period.**

**Let me begin with "Rain," the novela of seventeen-year old Consuelo and thirty-nine-year-old Doña Socorro brought together by Fate, disguised as circumstance and coincidence. All Tecate is still talking about Consuelo and Doña Socorro. It's a story that proves what the ancients left written on papyrus over a thousand years ago: Love is without limits, the full power of Love has never been measured. And it's a good thing for us they did it on papyrus. If the wise men of the ancient world had saved their knowledge in the C-drive the whole file on Love would be lost to us today. Come, finish your mango Popsicle, and join me at my corner table at La Fonda for a margarita, mariachis, and a little bit of magic.**

**—Your Servidor.**

**Tecate, B.C., Mexico**

# Critical praise for Daniel Reveles' books

Daniel Reveles' folksy vignettes radiate with a love for the inhabitants of Tecate and a Mark Twain insistence on ironic plain-spokenness...Where tourists may see a dusty, uneventful town, for Reveles it teems with drama. His art appeals to anyone who longs for more authenticity in life—for more magic, less rush, and some poetic justice.

—Wendy L. Smith, *San Diego Union-Tribune*

Something magical about Mr. Reveles' writing draws me into each story. From the first paragraph of each tale I am transported across the border...With a few words he has me hearing the mariachis crooning, the raucous caw of the "cuervo", the excited laughter of children...With a few more words my throat was parched...later quenched with a frosty margarita.

—Vee Weber, *Discover Baja*

Reveles's stories make a heartfelt tour of the tiny border pueblo of Tecate. Few, if any, have written in English about any part of Mexico with such knowing, such heart, and such vividness. Cozy up for a deliciously spicy read.

—C.M. Mayo, author, *Miraculous Air* and *Sky Over El Nido*

The fascinating world that thrives on the border between Mexico and the United States, in which coexist two cultures often antagonistic, but always interlocked, comes to life in the magical stories of Daniel Reveles...A lively portrait of a dual society that looks for a solution to its conflicts and inconsistencies. Reveles definitely stands out from the small group of writers that have been building the never-ending chronicles of life at the border.

—Jaime E. Olivares, *La Opinión*

This guy has it—he knows the heart of Baja and shows it to you in all of its raw truth. I can tell that he loves his people because I also love them. Get his books and learn to laugh and understand the culture that allows the down trodden people to laugh and endure.

—Bernie Swaim, author *Mi Baja: No Hurry No Worry, Bouncing Around Baja*

Reveles is intimate with life and his words flow from his heart for the people he writes about. Each story carries with it a deep perception into human nature which must include all the highs and lows, the successes and failures, and the strengths and weaknesses of humanity. Only a Mexican writer can bridge life's happiness and sorrows with graceful humor and have us believe it's truth.

—*Gringo Gazette*

In the hands of this master storyteller, Tecate becomes a microcosm of the US- Mexican border—lively and earthy, ironic and spicy.

—*Southwest BookViews*

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## Letters from Readers

I finished reading your book in one sitting. This was not the smartest thing to do, I now admit. These are stories to be savored over time. My hasty desire to consume this delicious meal left me hungry for more once I reached the final page. I have since got a hold of the other two, and this time, plan on taking my time with them. Thank you for them. I will cherish them throughout my years.

*Your book was one of the few things that gave me pleasure through a very bad cold I'm just getting over. I have plenty of things to read, but TLS was like reading chicken soup - very nourishing to the soul.*

I have just bought your book of short stories: *Tequila, Lemon, and Salt* Some years back, I read *Enchiladas, Rice, and Beans* and I loaned it to a friend and never got it back. I will pick up another copy of that book, also *Salsa and Chips* which I have not read yet. This time, when I loan them out, I will attach some sort of tracking system.

*I have just five minutes ago finished reading your latest book, which you kindly signed for me a couple of days ago, thank you. A thoroughly enjoyable read, and I look forward to reading your other books, present and future.*

I came across your novel *Tequila, Lemon, and Salt* during a recent trip to the Diana Bar. What I have thus far read articulates with truth and humor that I have seen in this town.

*I heard about your book from some staff members in our teachers' lounge. I enjoyed reading it very much and am looking forward to reading *Enchiladas, Rice, and Beans* next.*

Thanks for enriching our reading lives. I will recommend the books to students at my High School for homeless teens, where I do volunteer book discussions.

*I just finished your third installment of stories from Tecate. Once again, I found your stories to be in turn funny, sad, introspective, and amazing. Great job, and please don't wait another seven years for your next set of stories!*

I am a member of a Book Group which has been meeting monthly since 1988. Currently, we are reading your book *Tequila, Lemon, and Salt*. . . congratulations on your most recent award. I hope your work will continue to be recognized and honored.

*I wanted to tell you how your book touched my heart, soul & funny bone too. That hasn't happened in many years, believe me and I am an avid reader. I raved about the book to my family, friends and strangers. I will be 75 years old next month. Your books are the presents I give to myself, keep on writing.*