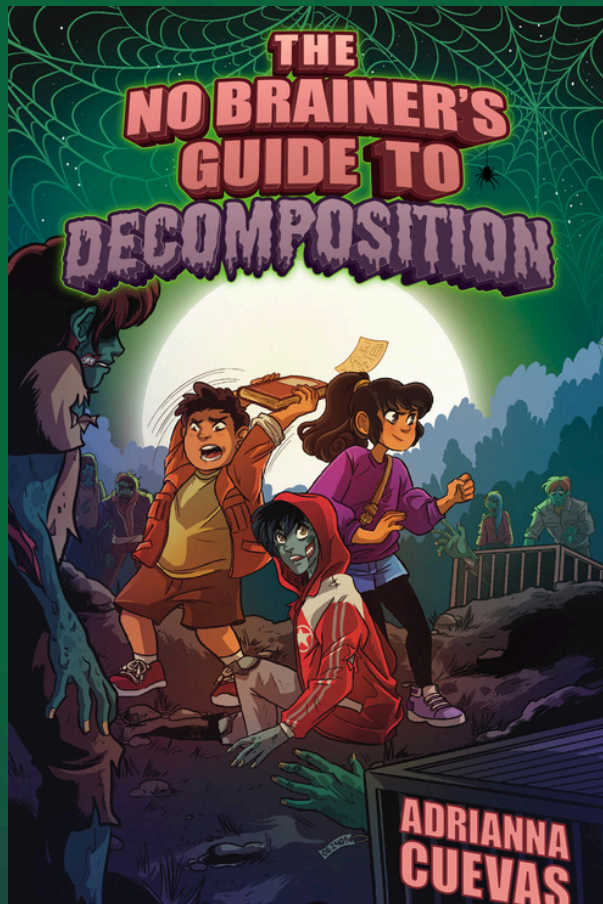


# THE NO BRAINER'S GUIDE TO DECOMPOSITION

## Teacher's Guide



# The No Brainer's Guide to Decomposition Summary

No one has ever called Frani Gonzalez squeamish. Seriously, whether it's guts (no big deal), bugs (move aside, she's got this), or anything else that you might find at the Central Texas Forensic Anthropology Research Facility, to her and her dad, the university's body farm is just home.

Having bodies buried in her backyard doesn't exactly make Frani the most popular kid in school, and the imaginary spider that lives in a web in her brain isn't helping either. Arañita's always to blame for the distracted thoughts weaving through Frani's mind. But when a hand reaches out of the ground and grabs her ankle, Frani realizes that she's got bigger problems.

Not everything is as it seems at the body farm, and now Frani must help the teenage zombie that crawled out of the dirt...before he gets too hungry. But as more and more zombies begin to appear—and they seem to get less and less friendly—can Frani embrace the true nature of her brain and count on new friendships to solve the body farm's mystery before it's overrun with the undead?

## Background Information

### Forensic Anthropology Research Facilities

Frani's father is a professor at a university research facility studying the decomposition of cadavers. This facility is modeled after actual research institutions at Texas State University (the largest of its kind in the US) and the University of Tennessee (the first of its kind in the US). These facilities work with other scientists as well as law enforcement to develop methods useful in criminal and forensic science. Cadavers are donated through wills and range in age, race, and gender. The work of these institutions has been invaluable to our knowledge of the human body.

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# Background Information (cont'd)

## ADHD

Frani has ADHD. This is better described as difficulty regulating attention, emotions, and behavior, rather than simply a lack of attention. Kids with ADHD also have their own set of strengths, including hyperfocus, creativity, experiential memory, passion, enthusiasm, and humor. ADHD is a pattern of strengths and challenges that must be analyzed as a whole.

## Statistics on Missing Minority Children

The FBI's National Crime Information Center Database listed about 400,000 missing children under 18 in 2022. Thirty-seven percent of those children were Black, even though Black children only make up about 14% of the population of the US. Twenty percent of missing children are Hispanic. Data shows that these children receive less media attention than missing white children despite making up a larger percentage overall of missing children. A study in 2015 showed that although Black children made up for 35% of missing children that year, they only amounted to 7% of media references.

## Pre-reading Activity

1) Look at the cover of the book. Where do you think the three characters are standing? What details do you notice about the place? What kind of personality do you think each character has based on how they look?

2) The book opens with these words from Frani- "Overcooked eggs look like exploded eyeballs. The yellow and white bits stick to the pan on the stove, glued to the surface because not only did I forget to spray the skillet, I got distracted by the gurgling sound of Profe's coffee maker. The bubbling and hissing noise made me think of a story I wrote about an archaeologist being dangled over a pit of acid. By the time I imagined my hero swinging from the rope tied around his ankle to safety, the smell of burnt eggs snapped me back to reality and my breakfast was beyond saving."

Based on this paragraph, think of three adjectives you would use to describe Frani. Do you have anything in common with Frani?



# Discussion Questions

- 1) In chapter 1, we meet Frani, who has ADHD. One part of Frani's ADHD is that she gets distracted easily. In this chapter, what evidence do you see of this happening?
- 2) Frani refers to her ADHD as Aranita, a spider that lives in her brain. Why do you think she does this?
- 3) Why is Frani worried about what Benji thinks of her when she meets him in chapter 2?
- 4) In chapter 4, what proof do Frani and her father discuss that shows how something at the body farm can't come back to life?
- 5) In chapter 6, what evidence does Frani use to determine that the figure in the red hoodie is dead?
- 6) By chapter 6, what do you notice about how Benji treats Frani's ADHD habits in comparison to how Essie treats her? Use specific examples.
- 7) In chapter 7, why do you think Frani doesn't have trouble focusing when she's working with the PUD?
- 8) In chapter 10, Profe says that a woman has wandered onto the university football field and tried to attack the players. Who do you think this woman might be?
- 9) Why do you think Frani encourages Santiago to ride the skateboard in chapter 12?
- 10) In chapter 14, what connection do you think Benji is making when he says that it's interesting that the DUD they found wandering outside the library was an author?
- 11) In chapter 15, we find out that Pilar has been up to no good. Look back at chapter 3. What evidence can you find in this chapter of what she was really doing?
- 12) In chapter 15, Frani says that Aranita never lets her rest. What evidence have you seen so far in the story that this is true?
- 13) In chapter 17, Frani says she's tired of being different. What does she really have in common with Santiago and Benji?
- 14) In chapter 19, why is Frani worried that her brain is like Pilar's?
- 15) In chapter 22, how does Frani's opinion of her ADHD change?
- 16) In Chapter 24, do you think Santiago regrets what happened to him?
- 17) At the end of the story, why do you think Essie has a change of attitude toward Frani?
- 18) How do you think Frani feels about her ADHD at the end of the book in comparison to the beginning?



## Extension Responses

Select one of the following quotes from *The No Brainer's Guide to Decomposition*. Write an extended response explaining whether you agree or disagree with the opinion presented in the quote. Be sure to:

- Clearly state a central idea
- Organize your writing
- Develop your writing in detail
- Choose your words carefully
- Use correct spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation

- 1) Rest, Frani. Sometimes it's the most productive thing you can do.
- 2) We all think differently.
- 3) There's no goodbye for the people we love. Not really. Our bodies may go back in the dirt, but there's no goodbye for our hearts.

## For Further Reading

*The Cursed Moon* by Angela Cervantes

*Los Monstruos* series by Diana Lopez

*Jasmine is Haunted* by Mark Oshiro

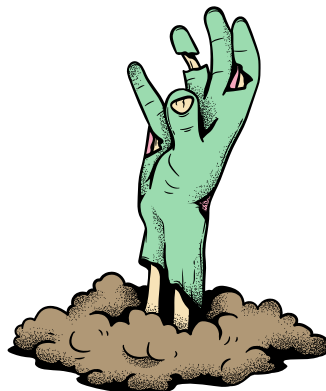
*Valentina Salazar is Not a Monster Hunter* by Zoraida Cordova

*The Curse on Spectacle Key* by Chantal Acevedo

*Ghostly, Ghostly Tales: Frights to Tell at Night* by Anastasia Garcia

*The Keeper* by Guadalupe Garcia Mccall

*The Witchlings* series by Claribel Ortega





# About the Author

Adrianna Cuevas is the author of the Pura Belpre honor book **The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez**, Cuba in My Pocket, the Edgar award-winning **The Ghosts of Rancho Espanto**, **Mari and the Curse of El Cocodrilo**, and **What Fell From the Sky**. She is a first-generation Cuban-American originally from Miami, Florida. A former Spanish and ESOL teacher, Adrianna currently resides outside of Austin, Texas with her husband and son. When not substitute teaching at her local high school, cheering for the Florida Panthers hockey team, or setting off the smoke alarm in her kitchen, she is writing her next middle grade novel.

## Also by Adrianna Cuevas

