Cemetery Boys
Instructional Resource Guide

Suggested Grade Levels: 7-12
Author: Aiden Thomas

User’s Guide
Designed for use with middle and high school students, these writing prompts provide opportunities for students to develop a deeper understanding of the following topics/standards:

- SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- RL.3 Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters and advance the plot or develop the theme.
- RL.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.
- RL.6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature.
- W.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
- W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
- W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

Important Note: Many of the prompts investigate the experiences of marginalized identities; therefore, offering students a choice of prompts allows them to select one that resonates with them the most.

About the Author
Aiden Thomas is a trans, Latinx, New York Times Bestselling Author with a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Mills College. Originally from Oakland, California, they now make their home in Portland, Oregon. Aiden is notorious for not being able to guess the endings of books and movies and organizes their bookshelves by color.

About the Book
Bestowed by the ancient goddess of death, Yadriel and the gifted members of his Latinx community can see spirits; women have the power to heal bodies and souls, while men can release lost spirits to the afterlife. But Yadriel, a trans boy, has never been able to perform the tasks of the brujas - because he is a brujo. Yadriel’s journey toward full acceptance and inclusion is filled with magic, love and sacrifice. The story explores gender identity, gender roles and family dynamics — including those of a chosen family.

Discussion Questions
- In an interview with NPR, Aiden Thomas stated, “[T]eaching [about LGBTQ+ identities] falls onto the shoulders of queer/trans kids, which can be exhausting. That's exactly what Yadriel is dealing with throughout Cemetery Boys. I hope this book, and other books coming from authentic queer experience, might help teach some folks so the trans kids in their lives don't have to.”
  - What does this book “teach” about LGBTQ+ identities? How do the characters, events and/or setting illustrate these lessons? [Standards RL.1 & SL.1]
+ Read the poem "notes on the seasons" by Raquel Salas Rivera. Which character from the book would most connect to the point of view expressed in the poem? What evidence from the texts show this connection? [Standards RL.6 & SL.1]

+ “Julian’s hand fell to his lap. He looked out over the water again. The wind tugged at his jacket. He closed his eyes and grinned. Below, the waves crashed. The moonlight painted him in shades of blue. His edges blurred like watercolors spilling outside of their lines.” (p. 275)
  ○ How does the figurative language the author uses to describe Julian in this quotation convey more about his character than just his appearance? What other figurative language in the book reveals something important about a character, event, or setting? [Standards RL.4 & SL.1]

**Writing Prompts**

+ “Navigating pronouns was a minefield when language was based on gender.” (p. 37) Some romance languages use masculine and feminine forms of words for objects; even English speakers assign gender to objects like cars and boats. Write a speech that explains how speakers of a language like English can acknowledge non-binary or transgender identities in a gendered language. Think about the audience of your speech and tailor your speech to that audience. [Standard W.2]

+ “But belonging meant denying who he was. Living as something he wasn’t had nearly torn him apart from the inside out. But he also loved his family, and his community. It was bad enough being an outsider; what would happen if they just couldn’t — or wouldn’t — accept him for who he was?” (p. 29)
  ○ Think of somebody--real or fictional--who has struggled to fit in. Write a persuasive letter to this person explaining your chosen viewpoint: it’s more important to fit in and belong than to be true to yourself or it’s more important to be your authentic self than to fit in. Consider what may have to be sacrificed in order to fit in, as well as what may have to be sacrificed in order to be true to yourself. Use evidence from your life, literature, current events and/or history to support your position. [Standard W.1]

+ Write an essay in which you analyze how Julian impacts Yadriel’s development as a character throughout the text. [Standards RL.3 & W.2]

+ Select one scene in the book in which a character’s cultural background plays an important role. [Standard RL.6] Respond to one of the prompts below:
  ○ Rewrite the scene by giving the character a different cultural background. [W.3]
  ○ Write an essay in which you analyze how the scene would be different if a character had a different background. [W.2]