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Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe: Part Six, Chapter Thirteen
Summary & Analysis

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Themes and Colors Key

LitCharts assigns a color and icon to each theme in *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, which you can use to track the themes throughout the work.

Identity, Ethnicity, and Masculinity

Silence and Trauma vs. Communication

Family and Coming of Age

Intellectualism and Emotion vs. Physical Strength

Summary

Analysis

[Ari](#) and [Dante](#) can't find much to talk about. Ari reads poems to Dante and neither of them go back to work. Ari thinks that in some ways, he feels closer to Dante than ever, but further away in others. One morning, Ari takes the photos of [Bernardo](#) and tells Dante what happened. Bernardo was 15 and an angry boy. One night, he picked up a prostitute. Dante interrupts and asked where Bernardo got the money, since what 15-year-old has money for a prostitute, but Ari cuts him off. He says that the prostitute was a "transvestite," and Bernardo lost his temper and beat "him" until "he" died. They discuss that Dante already knew about transvestites, but Ari didn't. Ari says it gets worse: in prison, Bernardo killed someone else.

Ari uses the word "transvestite" and male pronouns to refer to the person Bernardo killed, which could suggest that the person was male-identifying but liked to dress in stereotypically feminine clothing. (Today, some consider "transvestite" to be an offensive term.) Another possibility is that the person was transgender, meaning that they identified as a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth. The novel takes place in the 1980s, when "transgender" wasn't a widely understood term, so it's unclear how this person would have liked others to refer to them. It's implied that Bernardo killed this person because he was upset that the prostitute he picked up wasn't a cisgender woman. The fact that Bernardo killed this person suggests that while Ari may crave mentorship from Bernardo, it might be better for his well-being that Bernardo isn't in his life. After all, if Bernardo is willing to kill a "transvestite," it's unlikely that he'd look kindly on his brother being gay.

Active Themes

[Dante](#) offers his condolences but [Ari](#) says he's glad to know and would like to get to know [Bernardo](#) someday. Ari says that Bernardo's story is so sad and he's afraid that he's like him. Dante says that he knows Ari broke [Julian](#)'s nose and asks why Ari never told him. Ari says that he just wanted to hurt Julian for hurting Dante. They discuss Dante's injuries and that Dante doesn't like the pain pills, but he does like marijuana. They laugh and Dante says that Ari isn't like Bernardo. Ari isn't sure about this.

For Ari, it's disturbing that he might be angry like Bernardo, if not about the same things. In his defense, Ari beat up Julian because he wanted to protect and avenge Dante, not because he flew into a rage when someone's body or identity didn't match what he expected. Talking about all of this also allows Ari and Dante to get closer to each other and begin to move on from this particular trauma more healthily.

Active Themes

[Dante](#) asks if it bothers [Ari](#) that he was kissing [Daniel](#). Ari says that he thinks Daniel is an awful person. Ari wouldn't have left Dante. Dante says that he's glad that Ari broke [Julian](#)'s nose and tries to defend Daniel when Ari insists that he doesn't care about Dante. Dante says that he'd like to tell Ari a secret: in his head, he was kissing Ari and not Daniel. Ari shrugs and tells Dante to get a new head.

For Ari, beating up Julian was all about loyalty, and he sees that Daniel isn't a loyal person in any way. Again, however, he's ignoring the fact that Daniel did what he needed to do to keep himself safe, something that speaks to Ari's youth, inexperience, and naïveté.


Active Themes

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Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF BENJAMIN ALIRE SAENZ
Benjamin Alire Saenz grew up in the town of San Antonio, and grew up on a small farm in New Mexico. After graduating high school, he spent time in Texas studying and writing a variety of different degrees, including in philosophy, theology, English, and creative writing. He spent several years as a priest in the early 1980s, but ultimately with the order. Saenz began to study and write in 1985, and started publishing books of poetry in 1992. Saenz began writing about the LGBT experience in his novels, and won the 1996 Southwest Book Award. After coming out as gay in the late 2000s and seeing a doctor from his wife of 15 years, Saenz began writing about the LGBT experience in his novels. These novels, including Aristotle and Dante, have been some of his most critically successful works.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT
The late 1980s were hard years for both gay rights and AIDS activism, something that would be greatly affected the lives of gay men like Ari and Dante. In 1987, when the novel begins, the Second National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights took place. Police estimate that about half a million people marched. At the event, Clowd's America's NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt to community art project memorializing the lives of people who died of AIDS was displayed for the first time. Since Saenz's Dante spends a school year in the first U.S. state to decriminalize homosexuality in 1962, San Francisco, where Dante and Ari spend most of the novel, didn't follow suit until 2003 when forced to do so to comply with the Supreme Court's ruling in Lawrence v. Texas. Gay marriage, meanwhile, didn't become legal on a national level until 2015, when people Ari and Dante age would've been almost 30 years old.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS
Many of Saenz's young adult books tackle issues of Mexican American identity, sexuality, or both, and many of his protagonists are characters who resemble both Ari and Dante. These include: The Inexplicable Logic of My Life and Last Night I Sang to the Monster. Other novels that delve into the intersection of cultural identity and sexuality include: Before Apollo Hit a Cow, Should Fear be Sarah? Farson, Fama, Bla'ho, Juan Solorzano, and The Daylight Marriage of Isabel by David Kurauskis. Aristotle and Dante also joins the growing genre of LGBT YA fiction, which includes novels like Boy by Albert Lin's, Sparrow, the Strongest Swords, Nick Burris. The Year of Oboya, and Boy Meets Boy by David Levithan.

KEY FACTS

- Full Title:** Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe
- When Written:** 2010-2011
- Where Written:** El Paso, Texas
- When Published:** 2012
- Literary Period:** Contemporary
- Genre:** Young Adult Novel, Bildungsroman
- Setting:** El Paso, Texas, 1987-1988
- Class:** As the historical family meeting, Ari admits that he's gay and loves Dante.
- Antagonist:** Julian Enriquez and his crimes, homophobia
- Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT
Caring for Ari: Ari's interest in foul language certainly isn't accidental. Saenz has written in his blog that he adores cursing and thinks it helps him escape from the adult world and connect with the child inside of him.

PLOT SUMMARY
Fifteen-year-old Ari wakes up on the first day of summer vacation feeling miserable. In order to escape his unhappy friends, Ari goes to the pool. On the walk there, he thinks about how Vietnam changed Dad, and how Dad won't talk about Vietnam or Ari's older brother, Bernardo, who is in prison. Ari doesn't know what Ari's brother committed. At the pool, Ari doesn't know how to swim and hates the social hierarchy. A skinny and spindly boy named Dante offers to teach Ari to swim. They become friends instantly. After a few swimming lessons, Dante introduces Ari to his parents, Mr. Quintana is happy, open, and unapologetic, but Dante says that Mrs. Quintana is "incurable." Ari doesn't know what the word means, but he thinks that Dante is incurable too. Dante claims he's soon while Ari reads poetry which Ari is surprised to enjoy. A few days later, Dante introduces Ari to his and Dad, and goes to Dad about his Mexican and American that Dad studied in before he went to Vietnam. Ari and Dante discuss that they're both intelligent, and Dante says he's trying to get an attorney. Ari tells the reader that he's ashamed, too, but only Dante knows why. Ari and Dante discuss Mexican nicknames, and Dante shares that he doesn't think he's Mexican enough. Dante spends the summer engaging one on one, and as an excuse to do so he invents a game in which he and Ari throw their shoes at the

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Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Close Reading Organizer - Part One, Chapter One

Directions: Read each summary entry and think about which themes listed in the Themes Key apply to it, then color in those themes in the Theme Tracker. Next, write a few sentences of Analysis to explain how the themes you chose apply to each summary section.

Themes Key

- 1 Identity, Ethnicity, and Masculinity
- 2 Silence and Trauma vs. Communication
- 3 Family and Coming of Age
- 4 Intellectualism and Emotion vs. Physical Strength

Summary	Theme Tracker	Your Analysis
Ari falls asleep one summer night, hoping that things will be different when he wakes up in the morning. Unfortunately, nothing is different when he wakes up. He turns on his radio. The song "Alone" by Heart is playing. Ari doesn't like the song and thinks that he's 15, bored, and miserable. The DJ annoyingly plays the theme song from the Lone Ranger. Ari groans as the DJ announces the date—June 15, 1987—and then wishes Waylon Jennings a happy birthday. Ari feels better when the DJ talks about how Jennings survived the plane crash that killed Buddy Holly and Richie Valens. The DJ puts on "La Bamba" and Ari wonders what Valens was thinking when the plane crashed.	1 2 3 4	

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that killed Buddy Holly and

Date: _____ Period: _____

Organizer - Part One, Chapter One

Answers

Summary entry and think about which themes listed in the Themes Key apply to it, then color in those themes in the Theme Tracker. Next, write a few sentences of Analysis to explain how the themes you chose apply to each summary section.

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