# Literature

SHORT STORY

## AUTHOR STUDY



**Gary Soto** was born and raised in Fresno, California. He has written many books of fiction and poetry about what it is like to grow up as a Mexican American. Many of Soto's stories and poems come from his own childhood experiences. In addition to writing, Soto teaches and produces short films for Spanish-speaking children.

## BEFORE YOU READ

Think about something you've always wanted. What would you do if you finally had the chance to get it, but you weren't sure if the way you were able to get it was quite right? In this story, Fausto has the "no-guitar blues," but possibly not for long.

"The No-Guitar Blues" was made into a short film, called *The Pool Party.* Of all Soto's stories this is the only one that has been adapted for film.

Keep the following in mind as you read:

- Many Spanish words and phrases appear in this story. Use the footnotes to learn what they mean and how to pronounce them.
- Los Lobos (the Wolves) is a rock group.



**Reading Standard 3.2** Evaluate the structural elements of the plot (for example, subplots, parallel episodes, climax), the plot's development, and the way in which conflicts are (or are not) addressed and resolved.

# The No-Guitar Blues

**Gary Soto**



The moment Fausto saw the group Los Lobos on "American Bandstand," he knew exactly what he wanted to do with his life—play guitar. His eyes grew large with excitement as Los Lobos ground out a song while teenagers bounced off each other on the crowded dance floor.

He had watched "American Bandstand" for years and had heard Ray Camacho and the Teardrops at Romain Playground, but it had never occurred to him that he too might become a musician. That afternoon Fausto knew his
10 mission in life: to play guitar in his own band; to sweat out his songs and prance around the stage; to make money and dress weird.

"The No-Guitar Blues" from *Baseball in April and Other Stories* by Gary Soto. Copyright © 1990 by Gary Soto. Reprinted by permission of ***Harcourt, Inc.***

**PREDICT**

"The No-Guitar Blues"—what might that title mean? Figure it out, and you'll be able to predict the basic situation of this story. Then, keep reading, and find out what happens.

**SOMEBODY WANTED BUT SO**

The first sentence in the story tells you who the somebody is and what he wants. Circle the words or phrases that give you this information. Put an *S* above the word that identifies the "Somebody" and a *W* above the words that identify what he "Wants."

Notes

SOMEBODY WANTED BUT SO

Re-read lines 32–45 to find a **complication** in the story's **plot.** In what way don't things turn out as Fausto had hoped?

Fausto turned off the television set and walked outside, wondering how he could get enough money to buy a guitar. He couldn't ask his parents because they would just say, "Money doesn't grow on trees" or "What do you think we are, bankers?" And besides, they hated rock music. They were into the *conjunto*[1] music of Lydia Mendoza, Flaco Jimenez, and Little Joe and La Familia. And, as Fausto recalled, the last album they bought was *The Chipmunks Sing Christmas Favorites.*

But what the heck, he'd give it a try. He returned inside and watched his mother make tortillas. He leaned against the kitchen counter, trying to work up the nerve to ask her for a guitar. Finally, he couldn't hold back any longer.

"Mom," he said, "I want a guitar for Christmas."

She looked up from rolling tortillas. "Honey, a guitar costs a lot of money."

"How 'bout for my birthday next year," he tried again.

"I can't promise," she said, turning back to her tortillas, "but we'll see."

Fausto walked back outside with a buttered tortilla. He knew his mother was right. His father was a warehouseman at Berven Rugs, where he made good money but not enough to buy everything his children wanted. Fausto decided to mow lawns to earn money, and was pushing the mower down the street before he realized it was winter and no one would hire him. He returned the mower and picked up a rake. He hopped onto his sister's bike (his had two flat tires) and rode north to the nicer section of Fresno in search of work. He went door-to-door, but after three hours he managed to get only one job, and not to rake

1. ***conjunto*** (kän·kho͞on′tō): style of music popular near the U.S.-Mexico border.

leaves. He was asked to hurry down to the store to buy a loaf of bread, for which he received a grimy, dirt-caked quarter.

He also got an orange, which he ate sitting at the curb. While he was eating, a dog walked up and sniffed his leg. Fausto pushed him away and threw an orange peel skyward. The dog caught it and ate it in one gulp. The dog looked at Fausto and wagged his tail for more. Fausto tossed him a slice of orange, and the dog snapped it up and licked his lips.

"How come you like oranges, dog?"

The dog blinked a pair of sad eyes and whined.

"What's the matter? Cat got your tongue?" Fausto laughed at his joke and offered the dog another slice.

At that moment a dim light came on inside Fausto's head. He saw that it was sort of a fancy dog, a terrier or something, with dog tags and a shiny collar. And it looked well fed and healthy. In his neighborhood, the dogs were never licensed, and if they got sick they were placed near the water heater until they got well.

This dog looked like he belonged to rich people. Fausto cleaned his juice-sticky hands on his pants and got to his feet. The light in his head grew brighter. It just might work. He called the dog, patted its muscular back, and bent down to check the license.

"Great," he said. "There's an address."

The dog's name was Roger, which struck Fausto as weird because he'd never heard of a dog with a human name. Dogs should have names like Bomber, Freckles, Queenie, Killer, and Zero.

**PREDICT**

Pause at line 52. What will the dog have to do with Fausto's getting what he wants?

**SOMEBODY WANTED BUT SO**

What is Fausto's new plan?

**VISUALIZE**

Pause at line 105. Imagine that you are Fausto. How do you feel about the place where the dog lives?

Fausto planned to take the dog home and collect a reward. He would say he had found Roger near the freeway. That would scare the daylights out of the owners, who would be so happy that they would probably give him a reward. He felt bad about lying, but the dog *was* loose. And it might even really be lost, because the address was six blocks away.

Fausto stashed the rake and his sister's bike behind a bush, and, tossing an orange peel every time Roger became distracted, walked the dog to his house. He hesitated on the porch until Roger began to scratch the door with a muddy paw. Fausto had come this far, so he figured he might as well go through with it. He knocked softly. When no one answered, he rang the doorbell. A man in a silky bathrobe and slippers opened the door and seemed confused by the sight of his dog and the boy.

"Sir," Fausto said, gripping Roger by the collar. "I found your dog by the freeway. His dog license says he lives here." Fausto looked down at the dog, then up to the man. "He does, doesn't he?"

The man stared at Fausto a long time before saying in a pleasant voice, "That's right." He pulled his robe tighter around him because of the cold and asked Fausto to come in. "So he was by the freeway?"

"Uh-huh."

"You bad, snoopy dog," said the man, wagging his finger. "You probably knocked over some trash cans, too, didn't you?"

Fausto didn't say anything. He looked around, amazed by this house with its shiny furniture and a television as large as the front window at home. Warm bread smells

filled the air and music full of soft tinkling floated in from another room.

"Helen," the man called to the kitchen. "We have a visitor." His wife came into the living room wiping her hands on a dish towel and smiling. "And who have we here?" she asked in one of the softest voices Fausto had ever heard.

"This young man said he found Roger near the freeway."

Fausto repeated his story to her while staring at a **perpetual** clock with a bell-shaped glass, the kind his aunt got when she celebrated her twenty-fifth anniversary. The lady frowned and said, wagging a finger at Roger, "Oh, you're a bad boy."

"It was very nice of you to bring Roger home," the man said. "Where do you live?"

"By that vacant lot on Olive," he said. "You know, by Brownie's Flower Place."

The wife looked at her husband, then Fausto. Her eyes twinkled triangles of light as she said, "Well, young man, you're probably hungry. How about a turnover?"

"What do I have to turn over?" Fausto asked, thinking she was talking about yard work or something like turning trays of dried raisins.

"No, no, dear, it's a pastry." She took him by the elbow and guided him to a kitchen that sparkled with copper pans and bright yellow wallpaper. She guided him to the kitchen table and gave him a tall glass of milk and something that looked like an empanada.[2] Steamy waves of heat escaped when he tore it in two. He ate with both eyes on the man and woman who stood arm-in-arm smiling at him. They were strange, he thought. But nice.

2. **empanada** (em′pə·nä′də) *n.:* filled, baked pastry popular in Latin America. Empanadas may contain meat, vegetables, or fruit.

**VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT**

**perpetual** (pər·pech′o͞o·əl) *adj.:* lasting or enduring forever.

**FLUENCY**

By yourself or with one or two others, read the boxed passage aloud. Make the dialogue sound natural, and give each character an individual voice.

**Notes**

**INFER**

Put it into words: What does Fausto think is strange (line 134) about these people?

**WORD KNOWLEDGE**

Look up *deceitful* (line 144) in a dictionary. What is the word's origin? What does *deceitful* mean? What are some related forms of the word?

**PREDICT**

Pause at line 158. What do you think Fausto will do with the money?

"That was good," he said after he finished the turnover. "Did you make it, ma'am?"

"Yes, I did. Would you like another?"

"No, thank you. I have to go home now."

As Fausto walked to the door, the man opened his wallet and took out a bill. "This is for you," he said. "Roger is special to us, almost like a son."

Fausto looked at the bill and knew he was in trouble. Not with these nice folks or with his parents but with himself. How could he have been so deceitful? The dog wasn't lost. It was just having a fun Saturday walking around.

"I can't take that."

"You have to. You deserve it, believe me," the man said.

"No, I don't."

"Now don't be silly," said the lady. She took the bill from her husband and stuffed it into Fausto's shirt pocket. "You're a lovely child. Your parents are lucky to have you. Be good. And come see us again, please."

Fausto went out, and the lady closed the door. Fausto clutched the bill through his shirt pocket. He felt like ringing the doorbell and begging them to please take the money back, but he knew they would refuse. He hurried away, and at the end of the block, pulled the bill from his shirt pocket: It was a crisp twenty-dollar bill.

"Oh, man, I shouldn't have lied," he said under his breath as he started up the street like a zombie. He wanted to run to church for Saturday confession,[3] but it was past four-thirty, when confession stopped.

He returned to the bush where he had hidden the rake and his sister's bike and rode home slowly, not daring to

3. In the Roman Catholic religion, a person seeks God's forgiveness by telling his or her sins to a priest. This is called **confession.**

touch the money in his pocket. At home, in the privacy of his room, he examined the twenty-dollar bill. He had never had so much money. It was probably enough to buy a secondhand guitar. But he felt bad, like the time he stole a dollar from the secret fold inside his older brother's wallet.

Fausto went outside and sat on the fence. "Yeah," he said. "I can probably get a guitar for twenty. Maybe at a yard sale—things are cheaper."

His mother called him to dinner.

The next day he dressed for church without anyone telling him. He was going to go to eight o'clock mass.

"I'm going to church, Mom," he said. His mother was in the kitchen cooking *papas*[4] and *chorizo con huevos.*[5] A pile of tortillas lay warm under a dish towel.

"Oh, I'm so proud of you, Son." She beamed, turning over the crackling *papas.*

His older brother, Lawrence, who was at the table reading the funnies, mimicked, "Oh, I'm so proud of you, my son," under his breath.

At Saint Theresa's he sat near the front. When Father Jerry began by saying that we are all sinners, Fausto thought he looked right at him. Could he know? Fausto **fidgeted** with guilt. No, he thought. I only did it yesterday.

Fausto knelt, prayed, and sang . But he couldn't forget the man and the lady, whose names he didn't even know, and the empanada they had given him. It had a strange name but tasted really good. He wondered how they got rich. And how that dome clock worked. He had asked his mother once how his aunt's clock worked. She said it just worked, the way the refrigerator works. It just did.

Notes

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

**fidgeted** (fij′it·id) *v.:* moved in a restless, a nervous, or an uneasy way.

4. ***papas*** (pä′päs) *n.:* potatoes.
5. ***chorizo con huevos*** (chō·rē′zō kôn wā′vōs): sausage with eggs.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

**reluctantly** (ri·luk′tənt·lē) *adv.:* unwillingly.

If you felt you just had to give away twenty dollars, would you be eager to give the money away? If you understand how Fausto feels in this situation, you'll understand the word *reluctantly.*

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

**charity** (char′i·tē) *n.:* voluntary giving of money or help to those in need.

Notes

Fausto caught his mind wandering and tried to concentrate on his sins. He said a Hail Mary and sang, and when the wicker basket came his way, he stuck a hand **reluctantly** in his pocket and pulled out the twenty-dollar bill. He ironed it between his palms, and dropped it into the basket. The grown-ups stared. Here was a kid dropping twenty dollars in the basket while they gave just three or four dollars.

There would be a second collection for Saint Vincent de Paul,[6] the lector announced. The wicker baskets again floated in the pews, and this time the adults around him, given a second chance to show their **charity,** dug deep into their wallets and purses and dropped in fives and tens. This time Fausto tossed in the grimy quarter.

Fausto felt better after church. He went home and played football in the front yard with his brother and some neighbor kids. He felt cleared of wrongdoing and was so happy that he played one of his best games of football ever. On one play, he tore his good pants, which he knew he shouldn't have been wearing. For a second, while he examined the hole, he wished he hadn't given the twenty dollars away.

Man, I coulda bought me some Levi's, he thought. He pictured his twenty dollars being spent to buy church candles. He pictured a priest buying an armful of flowers with *his* money.

Fausto had to forget about getting a guitar. He spent the next day playing soccer in his good pants, which were now his old pants. But that night during dinner, his mother said she remembered seeing an old bass *guitarron* the last time she cleaned out her father's garage.

6. **St. Vincent de Paul** (1580?–1660?) was a French priest who helped the poor. Today, St. Vincent de Paul Societies carry on that mission.

"It's a little dusty," his mom said, serving his favorite enchiladas. "But I think it works. Grandpa says it works."

Fausto's ears perked up. That was the same kind the guy in Los Lobos played. Instead of asking for the guitar, he waited for his mother to offer it to him. And she did, while gathering the dishes from the table.

"No, Mom, I'll do it," he said, hugging her. "I'll do the dishes forever if you want."

It was the happiest day of his life. No, it was the second-happiest day of his life. The happiest was when his grandfather Lupe placed the *guitarron,* which was nearly as huge as a washtub, in his arms. Fausto ran a thumb down the strings, which vibrated in his throat and chest. It sounded beautiful, deep, and eerie. A pumpkin smile widened on his face.

"OK, *hijo,*[7] now you put your fingers like this," said his grandfather, smelling of tobacco and aftershave. He took Fausto's fingers and placed them on the strings. Fausto strummed a chord on the *guitarron,* and the bass **resounded** in their chests.

The *guitarron* was more complicated than Fausto imagined. But he was confident that after a few more lessons he could start a band that would someday play on "American Bandstand" for the dancing crowds.

**SOMEBODY WANTED BUT SO**

Just when he thinks he has to give up his dream, Fausto finds a solution to his problem. State it as a sentence beginning with "So."

**VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT**

**resounded** (ri·zound′id) *v.:* echoed or filled with sound.

**EVALUATE**

If you had been Fausto, what would you have done with the money?

**7. *hijo*** (ē′hô) *n.:* Spanish for "son."

## OWN THE STORY

### PRACTICING THE STANDARDS

**Plot** Analyze how the plot in this story works, based on the "Somebody Wanted But So" notes that are printed next to the story text. Identify elements of the plot such as **conflict, complications, climax,** and **resolution.** With a partner, discuss the resolution of Fausto's problem. Did you think it was a believable resolution?

### KEEPING TRACK

**Personal Word List** List the vocabulary words for this story in order of difficulty in your Personal Word List. Don't forget to add the new Spanish words you learned, too!

**Personal Reading Log** How much did you enjoy this short story, and why? Write your response to it in your Personal Reading Log, and award yourself 5 points on the Reading Meter.

**Checklist for Standards Mastery** You are learning a lot as you read these stories! Use the Checklist for Standards Mastery to see how well you have done mastering the standards and where you can improve.

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## Go Beyond a Literary Text

**Author Study** Use your library and the Internet to find out more about Gary Soto. Find five books by Gary Soto, and fill out the book list below.

### Works of Gary Soto

| Title | Date | Genre (novel, short story, poetry, nonfiction) | Brief Description |
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