

# VAMOS A LEER

*teaching latin america through literacy*



# VAMOS A LEER

Educator's Guide

## **The Queen of Water**

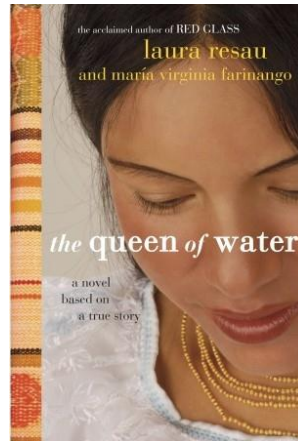
Written by Laura Resau with María Virginia Farinango

Published by Delacorte Press, 2011

Random House, 1996

ISBN: 978-0385738972

Ages 12 and up



## **BOOK SUMMARY**

Born in an Andean village in Ecuador, Virginia lives with her family in a small, earthen-walled dwelling. In her village of indígenas, it's not uncommon to work in the fields all day, even as a child, or to be called a *longa tonta*—stupid Indian—by the ruling class of mestizos, or Spanish descendants. On the day Virginia is taken from her village to be an unpaid servant to a mestizo couple, she has no idea what the next decade will hold for her.

In this poignant novel based on a true story, acclaimed author Laura Resau has collaborated with Virginia Farinango to recount an indigenous girl's unforgettable journey to self-discovery that will speak to anyone who has ever struggled to find his or her place in the world. Virginia's story will make you laugh and cry, and ultimately, fill you with hope.

## **AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS**

- Américas Award Honorable Mention
- Skipping Stones Honor Award for Multicultural/International Literature
- Bank Street Best Books, Outstanding Merit for ages 12-14
- Current 2012 Colorado Book Award Finalist
- A School Library Journal Best Book of 2011
- TAYSHAS list (Texas student reading list) 2012-2013
- ALA Best Fiction for Young Adults 2012

## AUTHOR'S CORNER

A little bit about Laura Resau in her own words:

I was born thirty-some years ago in Baltimore City and spent the first ten years of my life there in old brick houses with alleys. When I was eleven, my family moved to a Baltimore suburb that used to be farmers' fields and woods. When I wasn't in school, I was exploring the woods and streams and discovering remnants of what used to be there—rusted fences, ancient farm tools, and an abandoned barn.



Laura Resau and Maria Virginia Farinango

After I earned my B.A. in Anthropology and French, I decided I wanted to go somewhere faraway, so I got certified in teaching ESL (English as a Second Language) and sent job applications around the globe. A small university in a town in Oaxaca, Mexico was the first to offer me a job, and I snatched it up.

I moved to Fort Collins, Colorado, got married to Ian, and after five years of revising *What the Moon Saw*, I had it published with Delacorte/Random House, the press that's published all my books. As I wrote my next novel, *Red Glass*, I worked with immigrant families and taught ESL (English as a Second Language) and Cultural Anthropology at my local community college in Fort Collins. My book *Star in the Forest* was inspired in part by my work and friendships with immigrant families in my community.

After Ian and I adopted our son from Guatemala, I decided to devote myself to being a full time writer and mother...and to finding plenty of excuses to travel. During this time, I've celebrated the release of *The Indigo Notebook*, *Star in the Forest*, *The Ruby Notebook*, and *The Queen of Water*. I still travel internationally, usually a few times every year. And of course, I always carry a notebook with me wherever I go!

In 2004, I became friends with María Virginia Farinango, an indigenous Quichua woman who was a student at the community college where I taught. We decided to collaborate on writing the true story of her amazing girlhood, which became the book *The Queen of Water* (released in 2011). While I was researching her life in the Ecuadorian Andes, I had some incredible experiences and heard fascinating stories that inspired me to write *I* (2009 release).

(The above compiled from the author's website at <http://www.lauraresau.com/about.html>)

For more on Laura Resau check out the links below:

- [The author's website with all kinds of great resources](#). She has an entire section on her inspiration for the book, including how she met her co-author María Virginia Farinango. [Click here to go directly to her page on \*The Queen of Water\*](#).
- The Author's Blog—[Ocean in a Saucer](#)

- [Random House Publication](#) with one-page guides to all of Laura Resau's young adult novels
- [An interview](#) with Laura Resau from *The Pirate Tree* on writing *The Queen of Water*
- A [discussion guide](#) for *The Queen of Water* written by Laura Resau

**USING THE  
QUEEN OF  
WATER IN THE  
CLASSROOM**

*The Queen of Water* had me hooked from the very beginning. It's the story of Virginia, a young indígena born into an impoverished family in Ecuador. At the age of six, Virginia is sent away to work for a wealthier mestizo family. Both the reader and Virginia come to realize that this is the beginning of Virginia's life as a domestic slave. While domestic slavery (especially of a young child) is difficult enough to stomach, what makes it all the more troubling is that it is a true story *set in the 1980s*. In fact, it is co-written by the 'real' Virginia—María Virginia Farinango. For many of us, Virginia's years as a child slave coincide with our own childhoods. This is not a story from hundreds of years ago. We're not talking about the early colonization of the Americas. We're talking about child slavery in contemporary times. While the 1980s may seem like a distant past to many of our students, they will be able to identify with a protagonist who's about their same age.

The reader follows Virginia as she grows up in the Doctorita's household, cooking, cleaning, and caring for the young children. What we find in Virginia is a spirit of resistance. From her very first day in the Doctorita's home she refused to be what the Doctorita wanted—a docile, ignorant servant. Yet what we realize is that resistance is never a simple concept—it's not black and white. It's complicated. In resisting the mental and emotional abuse of the Doctorita and the mestizo class, Virginia also ends up rejecting her indígena roots. She finds she has turned into a mestiza in more ways than she could have imagined. While she may have escaped the Doctorita's home with significant pieces of her selfhood intact, she lost others, namely her ability to speak Quichua, the language of her family. When finally seeing her parents again after years of separation, Virginia finds she can no longer communicate with them.

Students often resist things they find dehumanizing or oppressing in our classrooms, and while their need to resist is valid, often times their resistance is done in a manner that is self-defeating. But the power of Virginia's story is that it forces us all to think more deeply about the things we resist and the effectiveness of our resistance. Not all resistance is equal, not all resistance gets us where we want to be, and sometimes it costs us more than we are willing to pay.

Virginia also offers us a valuable perspective on schooling and education, one that I think many of our students need to hear. Here in the United States education is mandatory, because of that the privilege involved in being able to go to school is often overlooked or unrecognized. Virginia must fight to learn to read. She must sneak around to read books or write poetry; she calls herself a secret-agent student. The parallels to what it was like to be a slave in

early American history are obvious, but, again, we must remind ourselves that this took place in the 1980s.

Virginia's story is heartbreaking and inspiring. It's a novel that most students will engage with early on as they become easily attached to the independent, strong, and vulnerable Virginia. *The Queen of Water* has received great reviews and critical acclaim for good reason. It's the highlighted novel for our September meeting of the Vamos a Leer book group. While it wasn't planned, the timing couldn't be better. Columbus Day is October 8<sup>th</sup>. I know many teachers who struggle with what to do with Columbus Day—Do we ignore it? Do we teach about it? How do we teach about it in a manner that encourages a multicultural and socially just understanding of knowledge and history? I believe this novel would be an excellent way to broach the topic of Columbus Day with students. It shows that indigenous rights issues are not just something of the past, but in fact are very much relevant today. And, hopefully, it will help our students to realize that history really does continue to impact the present.

## **LESSON PLANS & ACTIVITIES**

In addition to the lesson plans and activities included here, check out the other resources below:

- [A short reader's guide to accompany the book from BookBrowse](#)
- [An interview with María Virginia Farinango](#)
- [Links to stories and photos of Resau's time in Ecuador](#)
- [The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People](#)

The following lesson plans are divided into a number of categories: Geography; History; Social Issues: Education; Guided Reading Questions; and Reflective Writing Questions.

- The Geography, History and Social Issues sections are project-based activities or suggestions that can be used to introduce the novel, as projects to complete while reading the novel, or as closing assessment activities.
- The Guided Reading Questions accompany each of the three parts of the novel.
- The Reflective Writing Questions can be used in multiple ways, including as extended response questions, formal essays or individual closing assessments.

Common Core Standards Addressed:

K-12

### Reading

Key Ideas and Details

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

- Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

#### Craft and Structure

- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

#### Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

## Geography

### Ecuador

The story takes place in Ecuador. If you are interested in doing an entire unit on Ecuador, or an extended study on the country, beyond general background information, the link below is an excellent resource. It is a unit on Ecuador compiled through the Fulbright-Hayes Seminars Abroad program for educators. It contains 16 different thematic lessons on Ecuador

- [Sustainability and Development in Action: Ecuador as a Case Study](#)

Before beginning the novel, introduce your students to the geographical location of Ecuador and some background information. Below are links to maps and other geographical information.

- [Map of Ecuador](#)
- [Geography of Ecuador](#)
- [Lesson Plans on the 5 Themes of Geography of Ecuador](#)

Depending upon the technology available in the classroom, you could browse any of the sites linked below as a class, or direct students to these during individual research time.

- [Ecuador on Wikipedia](#)
- [Ecuador: The CIA Factbook](#)
- [Ecuador: Travel Information and Travel Guide—The Lonely Planet](#)

Be sure to point out the two main cities—Quito (the capital) and Otavalo—as important locations in the story. If time allows, have students (as individuals or groups) create short reports/ presentations on different aspects of Ecuador (e.g. the history, geography, people, customs, languages, food, artesanía, etc.) The students may benefit from this most if they begin it before you start the novel study, but then complete it while reading the novel. This will provide them some background information before beginning the novel, but then give them the opportunity to apply things they learn in the novel to their projects.

## History

### The Inca

On page 1 Virginia says, “As a little girl, I did not know I was a descendant of the Inca, the most powerful ancient civilization of South America.” Who are the Inca? What are they known for? What was their civilization like? What is the history between the Inca and the Spaniards? What happened to the Inca? How did people come to be mestizo or indígena? Use appropriate online and print resources to answer these questions.

## Social Issues in Education

### Bilingual Education

In the eight years that Virginia is with the Doctorita’s family, she loses her ability to speak or to understand Quichua. Think about the large number of students in the United States who start school speaking another language other than English, but then learn only in English. Do you think this is right? Is this similar to what Virginia experienced? Explain your answer. Research two different movements in language education—Bilingual Education and English-Only Education. What is the main argument of each movement? Do you think either of these are solutions for students who are bi- or multi-lingual? What do you think the solution is?

After students have researched both of these topics, you could divide the class in half and have students participate in a debate.

### Common Core Standards Addressed:

#### K-12

#### Reading

##### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

##### Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

#### Writing

##### Text Types and Purposes

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

##### Production and Distribution of Writing

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

##### Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

**Literary  
Interpretation:  
Guided Reading  
Questions**

- Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**Guided Reading Questions:**

**Part One: Chapters 1-9**

1. What does it mean to be mestizo? What does it mean to be indigenous? (p. 1-2)
2. What do we learn about Virginia early on? (Hint: Is she content with her life as it is? What does she want?) (p. 4-5)
3. What happens to Virginia at the end of the first chapter? Does she have any power or control in the situation?
4. How do the indígenas feel about the mestizos? Think about the words they use to describe them and what those words mean.
5. What do the mestizos think about the indígenas? Think about how the Doctorita treats Virginia and where Virginia sleeps.
6. What keeps Virginia from running away?
7. Compare how the Doctorita and Niño Carlitos treat Virginia. How are they different?
8. Virginia's first trip outside the apartment is bittersweet. She finally gets to see part of the city and walk around outside, but she also learns something when she overhears the shop owner's conversation with the Doctorita. What does she learn? (p. 31)
9. How does Niño Carlitos start protecting Virginia? (p. 35)
10. How does the Doctorita respond when Doña Mercedes praises Virginia for being obedient? What does *machucar* mean? Why do you think Doña Mercedes' eyes become watery when she hears this? (p. 36)
11. How does Virginia respond when she hears the Doctorita's explanation? (p. 37) What does this tell us about Virginia?
12. What was Virginia's first experience with school like? (p. 39)
13. What is one of the first things that Virginia does to become less like an indígena? (p. 43)
14. What else happens that makes Virginia realize she is changing? (p. 45)
15. What changes in chapter 8 about Virginia's feelings for the family? What does she do that shows this?
16. What memory of her mom remains the strongest for Virginia?
17. What happens when Virginia finally gets to go back to Kunu Yaku? Does she try and get back to her family?
18. What was Virginia's first experience in working for a mestizo?

**Part Two: Chapters 10-24**

19. Now that Virginia has been with the Doctorita and Niño Carlitos for three years, how have things changed? How has Virginia changed?
20. Why do you think Virginia responds to the music the new professor plays the way she does? (p. 80)
21. Why does Virginia decide she wants to learn how to read? (p. 83)



- What do you think life would be like if you couldn't read?
22. How does Virginia describe her learning? What kind of student does she call herself (p. 93)? Why does she have to learn like this?
  23. Could you ever imagine sneaking around and stealing a key to go to school on the weekend? Why would Virginia do this? Do you think most students in the U.S. would do this? Why or why not?
  24. Why does the Doctorita bring up school when they are on their way back to Yana Urku? (p. 101)
  25. When Virginia finally makes it back to her family's house, how does she feel? Does it feel like home to her? What does she think of it? (p. 106-107)
  26. What does she find in the house? (p. 107)
  27. What is Virginia's last memory of her older sister Matilde? (p. 108-111)
  28. What has Virginia wished for and gotten, but now realizes she doesn't want? (p. 111-112)
  29. How is Niño Carlitos different from Virginia's real father? What does Virginia feel like she gets from Niño Carlitos that she never got from her own father? (p. 118-120)
  30. How does Virginia cover up the drawer that she broke into? Does the Doctorita believe her? (p. 126-130)
  31. What does Virginia do to start looking more like what she believes is a beautiful mestiza? Do you think girls in the United States do the same thing? Is this healthy? What happens to Virginia? (p. 132)
  32. Who else besides Niño Carlitos stands up for Virginia and tries to protect her?
  33. How does Virginia's relationship with Niño Carlitos begin to change? Can Virginia tell the Doctorita about it? Why or why not?
  34. Why do you think Virginia feels a bond with Antonio so quickly? (p. 167)
  35. What is the paradox or the irony of the Doctorita calling Isaura's slave master a pig in the soap opera she watches with Virginia? (Hint: think about her relationship with Virginia, p. 168)
  36. Do you think that Virginia is a slave? Why or why not? How do you define the word slave?
  37. What do you think of the commercial that Virginia makes up to describe herself? Do you think it's true? (p. 192)

### **Part Three: Chapters 25-39**

38. Why do you think that Virginia doesn't agree to stay at Blanca's despite the mother's offer? Virginia says she's not ready to leave the family—why would she feel that way? Would you be able to walk away after eight years? Why or why not?
39. Do you think the Doctorita's family needs Virginia? Do you think they deserve Virginia?
40. Think about Virginia's conflicted feelings at her sister's wedding—how she is back with her family, but doesn't belong, preferring the Doctorita's family to her own. How would you feel if you were Virginia? Why? Explain your answer. (p. 240-243)
41. What do you think it would be like to no longer be able to

communicate with your parents? How would you feel if you and your parents spoke different languages or you had so little in common you had nothing to talk about?

42. In Part 3, Virginia talks a great deal about the differences between the indígenas and the mestizos. Explain how they're different and what this means in terms of what their lives are like and how they're treated in society. (p. 258-259)
43. Virginia describes the segregation between the indígenas and the mestizos as invisible lines that tourists don't recognize. Do you think these lines are really invisible, or do you think that tourists just don't want to see them or prefer to ignore them? Do you think the lines that separate classes or groups in the United States are invisible? Do you think that someone not familiar with the U.S. culture would recognize the difference between classes or groups of people? (p. 275)
44. Do you think there is some hypocrisy in how the mestizos in Otovalo capitalize on indigenous culture, while at the same time treating the indigenous the way they do? (p. 275)
45. What does Virginia mean when she says she's had three lifetimes? Explain (p. 281)
46. Why is Virginia afraid to go to Esperanza's birthday party? What does she mean when she says, "No, chica. Medicine won't fix this"? (p. 291-292)
47. Have you ever felt like Virginia, where you had to leave out large parts of your past or present because you didn't think you would be accepted? (p. 303)
48. Why do you think Virginia feels so good after giving her speech? (p. 320)
49. Why do you think about the ending? Was it what you expected?
50. Having finished the novel, explain what the following quote means for Virginia.  
*"Now I see that sometimes the person you thought was your enemy was really your teacher, or even, in an odd way, your savior. I see that wishes come true, in roundabout ways. I see that if you try to fit someone in a box, she might slip through the seams like water and become her own river."* (p. 342)

### **Reflective Writing Questions**

1. Virginia left her family when she was 7 years old. Think back to when you were 7—you were probably in second or third grade. How would you feel if your family had to sell you or give you away to work for someone else? Can you imagine being responsible for caring for a baby, cooking, and doing laundry when you were in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade? How would your life be different than it is now, if you'd been given away at the age of 7? Think about how Virginia describes her life on page 153. What would you have missed out on if you were put in the same position as Virginia?
2. How does Virginia resist the Doctorita? She finds many different kinds of ways—even on her first day in the house. Virginia refuses to believe that she is unimportant or deserves the abuse of the Doctorita. Does

Virginia's resistance work? Does she leave their home unscathed by the Doctorita in the end? In working so hard to resist the oppression of the Doctorita's family, something happens to Virginia. What do you think that is? Virginia may not end up the submissive, docile servant the Doctorita wanted, but what does Virginia think about being indígena? Is it something that she cherishes or something that she is embarrassed about?

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE



The Latin American & Iberian Institute (LAI) receives resources from the U.S. Department of Education to support K-12 teachers teaching about Latin America. Our goal is to provide a supportive environment for teachers across grade levels and subject areas so they can bring regional and linguistic knowledge of Latin America into their classrooms. For more information and materials that support teaching about Latin America in the classroom, visit our website at <http://laii.unm.edu/outreach>

Written by staff at the LAI, **Vamos a Leer Educator's Guides** provide an excellent way to teach about Latin America through literacy. Each guide is based upon a book featured in the Vamos a Leer book group. For more on Vamos a Leer, visit our blog at [bit.ly/vamosaleer](http://bit.ly/vamosaleer). This guide was prepared 07/ 2012 by Katrina Dillon, LAI Project Assistant.