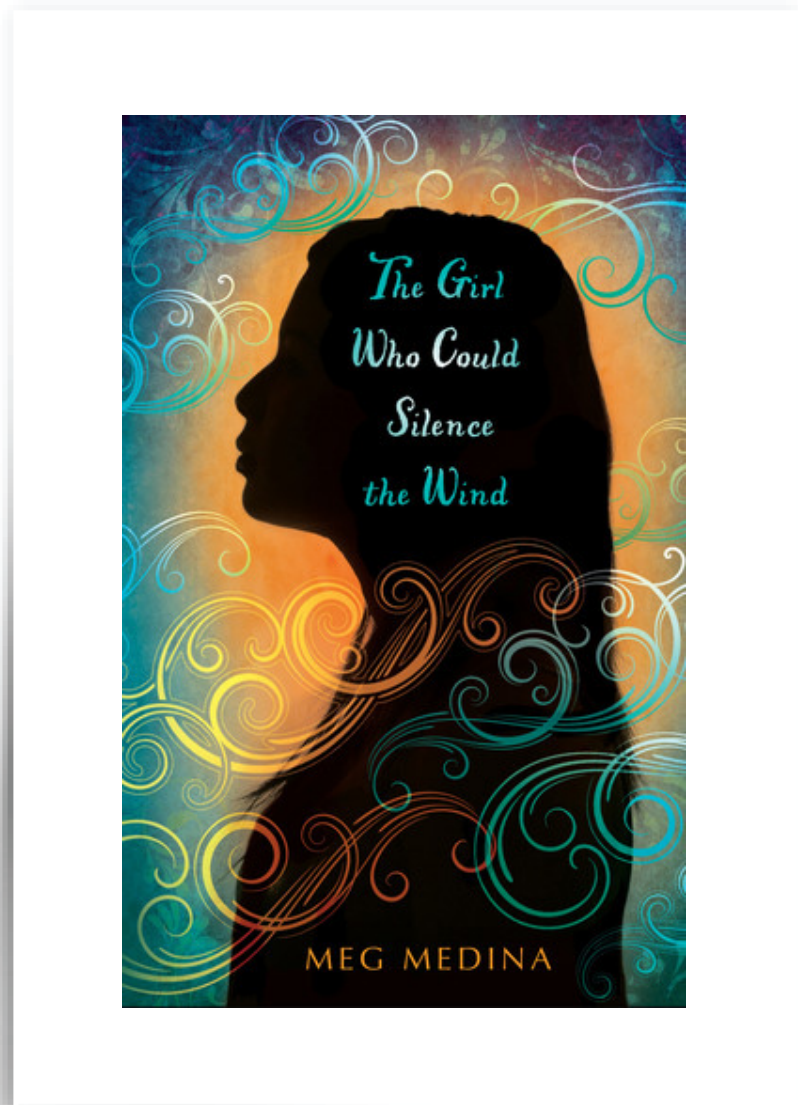


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teaching latin america through literacy



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Educator's Guide

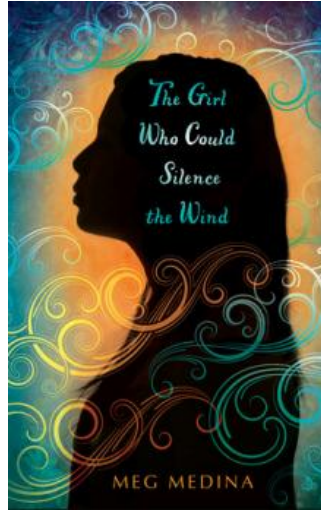
The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind

Written by Meg Medina

Published by Candlewick Press, 2012

ISBN: 9780763646028

Age Level: 12 and up



BOOK SUMMARY

Sixteen-year-old Sonia Ocampo was born on the night of the worst storm Tres Montes had ever seen. And when the winds mercifully stopped, an unshakable belief in the girl's protective powers began. All her life, Sonia has been asked to pray for sick mothers or missing sons, as worried parents and friends press silver milagros in her hands. Sonia knows she has no special powers, but how can she disappoint those who look to her for solace?

Still, her conscience is heavy, so when she gets a chance to travel to the city and work in the home of a wealthy woman, she seizes it. At first, Sonia feels freedom in being treated like all the other girls. But when news arrives that her beloved brother has disappeared while looking for work, she learns to her sorrow that she can never truly leave the past or her family behind.

With deeply realized characters, a keen sense of place, a hint of magical realism, and a flush of young romance, Meg Medina tells the tale of a strongwilled, warmhearted girl who dares to face life's harsh truths as she finds her real power.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:

- [CBI Recommended Reads \(UK\)](#)
- Mock 2012 Pura Belpré honor book, REFORMA, Heartland Chapter
- [Best Books 2013 Bank Street College](#)

AUTHOR'S CORNER

About Meg Medina

Medina is the author of several children's, young adult, and adult books. Medina is the daughter of Cuban immigrants. Her family emigrated to the United States as political exiles. She grew up in Queens, New York. She currently resides in Richmond, Virginia with her husband, children, and a host of other family members.



Medina has been an author for over fifteen years. Much of Medina's work focuses on young Latinas. Medina often uses inspiration from her own experiences as a Cuban-American for her stories. Medina also draws on her family's stories and experiences from Cuba. When asked why she tends to write books that are heavy on Latino culture, Medina has said, "I think it's really essential that we present really respectful, accurate examples of who we are: all the different people who make up what we call family" ([source](#)). Medina's work also emphasizes various themes that are of special importance to young adults. For example, one of her more recent works, [Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass](#), focuses on the theme of bullying. Also, Medina's portrayal of female characters is unique. It tends to shy away from institutional stereotypes, and her work is laden with female protagonists.

[Milagros: a Girl from Away](#) was released in 2008 and was Medina's first young adult novel. Some of her other works that are appropriate for students include [Tia Isa Wants a Car](#) (a children's book) and [The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind](#).

Medina's work examines how cultures intersect through the eyes of young people, and she brings to audiences stories that speak to both what is unique in Latino culture and to the qualities that are universal. Her favorite protagonists are strong girls. Her books have received sterling reviews, and she is the 2012 winner of the Ezra Jack Keats New Writers Award.

When she is not writing, Meg works on community projects that support girls, Latino youth and/or literacy. She lives with her extended family in Richmond, Virginia.

For more information, please visit [Meg Medina's Blog](#).

USING *The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind*

If you'd like to read what others have thought about the book, check out the links to other reviews below:

- [Kirkus Review](#)
- [Latin Baby Book Club](#)
- For more reviews, please see Medina's [press brochure](#)

IN THE CLASSROOM

Check out the trailer for the book [here](#) or at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=FHhOiwspEs

I had no trouble getting into Medina's novel. I finished it quickly in one sitting, but I found myself disappointed when I reached the end, not because I didn't like it, but because I was sad to see it end. I enjoyed the characters she'd created and wanted more.

While it's set in the imaginary Latin American village of Tres Montes, the story connects to many important contemporary issues, most notably immigration. Opportunity is all but gone in the small village of Tres Montes. For the men, employment is all but limited to working in the mines. Young boys watch their fathers work their lives away in the mines, only to watch them grow old and increasingly weak from the toll the mining work has taken on their bodies. Sonia travels to the capital as a hired employee for the wealthy Masón family, but her brother Rafael risks paying someone, much like a coyote, to get him north. An easy target, Rafael falls prey to the many dangers that continue to claim so many immigrants trying to make it to the United States for a better life. Kidnapped and ransomed, Rafael ultimately dies. Medina's novel could easily be paired with the documentary *Which Way Home* that follows several unaccompanied child immigrants as they journey through Mexico en route to the U.S. on a freight train they call "The Beast" (click [here](#) for our Educator's Guide to the film).

While quite different from *The Queen of Water*, the two novels share some common themes and would complement each other well. Both address issues of classism and racism through looking at the ways in which urban society is considered progressive and refined, while rural society is viewed as backwards and uneducated. Gender also plays an important role in the novel, as the reader sees the multiple ways in which the women of the story find themselves at the mercy of men with power. Perhaps it is because I was a teacher, but I found Pancho's character to be one of the more powerful aspects of the book. As a bright boy with an incredible imagination, Pancho weaves beautiful stories, but few see him as anything but a poor orphan. If he's noticed at all, it's typically with scorn or annoyance. Yet, as a child with little power or protection, Pancho represents the vulnerability of so many children in our society. For me, his story was a quiet reprimand or reminder that we could all be doing more to protect those who represent that same vulnerability.

The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind is beautifully written, with hints of magical realism and endearing characters. It's not necessarily a happy ending, but it is one of hope. A hope most clearly stated in one of my favorite lines of the book: ". . .they confessed they had always had a soft spot for old mountain stories like his, **for tales of humble people and the courage that it took to live their days. For true stories of magic and love.**" It's a book I'd highly recommend both for the experience of reading it in

and of itself, but also for the powerful discussions it could bring into the classroom.

LESSON PLANS & ACTIVITIES

The following lesson plans are comprised of two sections:

- A short section of suggested activities that can be used before, during or after the reading of the novel which are organized thematically by different subject areas
- Guided reading questions organized by parts of the book and extended response writing prompts. These questions have been written to support the types of reading and critical thinking skills required in standardized reading comprehension tests. The following key words and skills are highlighted: analyze, infer, evaluate, describe, support, explain, summarize, compare, contrast and predict.

In addition to the lesson plans and activities included here, check out the free discussion guide available through Meg Medina's website available [here](http://megmedina.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/discussion-guide-the-girl-who-could-silence-the-wind-by-meg-medina.pdf) or at <http://megmedina.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/discussion-guide-the-girl-who-could-silence-the-wind-by-meg-medina.pdf>

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.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

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

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.
- 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.

Social Studies and History

Immigration:

While the story takes place in an unnamed country in Latin America, many contemporary issues like immigration, are still important discussion points in the story. Both Sonia and her brother leave their small town village to travel north to find work. While Sonia is protected on her journey, her brother is not so lucky. Her brother falls into a trap all too common to immigrant experiences today. He is kidnapped and ransomed, but without any money, he's ultimately killed. Ask students to compare and contrast what happens in the story to the issues and dangers surrounding immigration to the United States from Latin America. Why does Rafael want to move North? Is this similar to the reason many people want to immigrate to the United States?

If time permits, watch the film *Which Way Home* with students. Have students compare and contrast the stories of adolescent immigration in the book and in the documentary. The following describes the film:

“Of the thousands of Latin American migrants traveling through Mexico with the hope of reaching the United States, approximately five percent are

unaccompanied children. Director Rebecca Cammisa follows several such children on their grueling but ever-hopeful journey north. Kevin and Fito have fled their small town in search of greater opportunities in America. José set out for the States but was quickly apprehended and now languishes in the bureaucratic process of deportation back to Honduras. These are just a few of the true stories of young children undertaking the brutal odyssey from Latin America to the United States, never letting their dire circumstances overtake their youthful exuberance. In this bold, revelatory documentary, Cammisa presents a harrowing tale of children in danger, riding on tops of freight trains and subject to conditions beyond the capacity of their tender years to navigate. But this is also a story of indefatigable youth, of children of very young age pursuing the only outlet for opportunity they perceive, and of the many allies and adversaries they encounter along the way.” – Tribeca Film Festival.

You can access the Educator’s Guide for the film [here](#) or at <http://www.laii.unm.edu/outreach/common/film-guides/Which-Way-Home.pdf>

Magical Realism:

Magical realism is an important part of this novel. As the name suggests, magical realism is blending of the magical or fantastical with the realistic, not limiting itself to either of the two genres. As students read the novel, ask them to pick out the realistic from the magical. Which parts of the story could actually happen? Which are less likely to be possible? Why do you think the author chose this genre for her novel? What does this genre allow her to do? For a more in-depth look at magical realism click on the links below for lesson plans.

- [Do you really believe in magic?](#) By Ann Gerber and Tericia Summers
- [Introduction to Magical Realism: Welcome to the world where reality as we know it is invaded by something strange to believe!](#) By Natasha Rubens

Milagros:

Milagros (meaning miracles in Spanish) are an important part of Sonia’s story. Many students may not be familiar with the symbolism of these small charms. There are a number of lesson plans available that explain the history and symbolism of the charms and provide an activity for students to make their own.

- [SchoolArtsRoom](#) provides a discussion of Milagros with links to an art lesson plan and a PowerPoint presentation with excellent visuals
- Crizmac provides [background](#) and [lesson plans](#)
- The Museum of International Folk Art provides [lesson plans](#) on Amulets, Milagros and Ex-votos from around the world

Guided Reading Questions**Prologue:**

1. What happened on the night of Sonia Ocampo's birth? Why do the villagers believe that she has been sent to protect them from harm?

Chapter 1:

1. What foreshadowing or foreboding does the author describe that lets us know that what they find of Luis will not be good? (p. 5)
2. Why does Sonia like the train? (p. 6) How do Papi and Rafael feel about the train? Do they agree? (p. 7)
3. What is hanging from Sonia's shawl? What do they represent? How long has Sonia worn her shawl? (p. 10)
4. Where did Señora Clara get the gold to make the charm? Why does she give it to Sonia? What has happened? (p. 11-12)
5. What do the boys of Tres Montes dream about? Why? (p. 13-14)
6. When the police find Luis, what has happened to him? (p. 18)

Chapter 2:

1. How does Luis' death affect Sonia? What does she come to believe about her special gift? (p. 19-21)

Chapter 3:

1. How does Cuca's broken hand help Sonia? What plan does Tía Neli have to help Sonia? (p. 24-25)
2. How are Tía Neli and Papi different in the things that they value? (p. 26)
3. How does Sonia convince Papi to let her go to work in the capital? (p. 29-30)
4. Ultimately, who decides if Sonia will go to the capital? (p. 32)

Chapter 4:

1. Who takes Sonia and Tía Neli to the plaza? How does Sonia know him? How does Sonia feel about him? How can you tell? (p. 34-35)
2. What does Tía Neli do to convince Señor Arenas to give Sonia the job at Casa Masón?

Chapter 5:

1. Why are Sonia and Pancho friendless, and thus, friends to each other? (p. 43) Do you think students in your own school are much different from Sonia and Pancho's classmates? Would Sonia and Pancho be accepted at your school?
2. How do Pancho's stories make Sonia feel? (p. 44)
3. Describe Irina Gomez, the school teacher. What is she like? Do you think she likes her students? Explain using examples from the story. (p. 46-49)

Chapter 6:

1. What kind of power do the villagers believe that Sonia has? Does Sonia believe that she has this power? (p. 53-54)
2. Who stops Rafael and Sonia as they're leaving? What do you think of her exchange with Rafael? (p. 56-57)
3. What secret does Rafael share with Sonia? Why does he want to do

this? (p. 59-61)

4. Why is Papi so against Rafael leaving? Think about how Papi responded to Luis death. (p. 61)
5. How is Rafael's milagro different from all the others that Sonia has been given? (p. 62)
6. What does Pancho leave for Sonia? (p. 63)

Chapter 7:

1. How does Sonia cover for Rafael? Does any of his family suspect he has left? (p. 68-69)

Chapter 8:

1. Why does the silence upset Papi? (p. 72)
2. When Tía Neli goes to Señor Arenas, does he help her? (p. 74-75)
3. Who ends up helping Tía Neli get the information she needs? (p. 75-76)

Chapter 9:

1. What rules has Pancho learned about being a taxi boy? (p. 78)
2. Predict what secret you think Pancho has overheard about Rafael? Why do you think it was so hard for him to keep from telling Sonia? (p. 79-80)

Chapter 10:

1. Where does Pancho take Tía Neli? Why do you think he brings her there? (p. 81-83)
2. Describe Mongo. What is his relationship like with Pancho? (p. 83)
3. What does Pancho have to do or give up in order to keep Tía Neli and Conchita from arguing before Tía Neli gets the information she needs about Rafael? Think about how little Rafael has. Why would he give this up? What does it show about his character? (p. 85-86)
4. What do you think Pancho means when he questions "In God's hands? Or would a taxi boy's hands have to do?" (p. 88)

Chapter 11:

1. What does Sonia read to pass the time on the train? How is Sonia like the girl in the story? (p. 91)
2. Do you think the city will be good for Sonia? Predict what you think her experience will be like once they arrive?
3. How does Dalia respond to Sonia's questions about Rafael? (p. 94-95) Do you think that Dalia is really a mean person or is she trying to hide something? Explain your answer.

Chapter 12:

1. Do you think Sonia's dream was just a dream or is it foreshadowing something? Why? (p. 97)
2. What happened to make Señora Masón learned to never love a servant? (p. 100-101)
3. Describe La Casita? How is it different from Sonia's home in Tres Montes? While it may be nicer, what is different about it that

surprises and makes Sonia uncomfortable? (p. 101-103)

Chapter 13:

1. What do the girls look like in their uniforms? (p. 106)
2. What kind of work does Sonia do on her first day? (p. 107-109)
3. Describe your first impressions of Teresa. (p. 109)

Chapter 14:

1. How does Eva react to the news that Señor Umberto has arrived? What does this say about his character? (p. 112-113)
2. Dalia helps Sonia twice the morning that they serve breakfast. What does she do? Do Dalia's actions surprise you? How is this contrary to how she's treated Sonia earlier in the novel? (p. 114, 120-121)
3. What do you think Eva and Dalia are protecting Sonia from?

Chapter 15:

1. How can Eva tell which servants work for which houses? Why do you think they each have their own uniform? If you were a servant would you want a uniform to identify you when you were out doing errands? (p. 124)
2. How are the school girls different in the capital? What does Sonia notice about them? (p. 127-128)
3. When Oscar asks Sonia what she'd like to be, how does she answer? (p. 129)
4. Do you think that Dalia says the things she does to Sonia because she wants to hurt her feelings, or because she is trying to protect her from getting hurt? Why? (p. 134)

Chapter 16:

1. Where will Sonia be working until Señor Umberto leaves? Do you think Teresa is doing this to protect or punish Sonia? Why? (p. 135-136)
2. Why does the newspaper article that Oscar reads upset Sonia? How does he attempt to calm Sonia? (p. 139-141)

Chapter 17:

1. What is distracting Pancho? (p. 142-142)
2. What does Pancho help Papi with? (p. 144) Why does it upset Pancho so much? (p. 145)

Chapter 18:

1. What is Teresa's story? Do you think it explains the way she treats the girls? Why? (p. 150-151)
2. What does the letter to Sonia say? How does Dalia respond? What does this reveal about her feelings for Rafael? (p. 153-154)

Chapter 19:

1. What kinds of things happen at Casa Masón the day that Sonia learns about Rafael? What or who do you think is causing these things? (p. 156)

2. Who comes to visit Sonia? (p. 157)
3. What two clues does Abuela give Sonia? (p. 158)
4. What does the key open? What does Sonia find? What does she learn about Rafael? (p. 159-161)

Chapter 20:

1. What does Sonia have to do to make her phone call? Who is she calling? (p. 163)

Chapter 21:

1. Who finds Sonia making the phone call? (p. 167)
2. How is Sonia saved from Umberto's advances? Who do you think made it happen? (p. 169)
3. What do you think Teresa is going to do? (p. 170)

Chapter 22:

1. Where does Pancho go? How does Pancho get Mongo alone to talk to him? (p. 174)
2. What does Pancho learn about arrangements made with Conchita Fo? What does this mean for Rafael? (p. 175)

Chapter 23:

1. What is Pancho's plan for getting to the capital to find Sonia? (p. 181-182)

Chapter 24:

1. What two choices does Teresa believe she has in regards to Sonia? (p. 184).

Chapter 25:

1. What happens when Pancho is discovered on the train? How does Marcos treat him? (p. 185-186)
2. How far does Pancho have to walk to get to the capital? (p. 187)

Chapter 26:

1. Who finds Pancho? What does he do with him? (p. 191)
2. Why is Mongo in La Fuente? (p. 192)
3. What does Mongo say about Rafael's situation? (p. 194)

Chapter 27:

1. How is Teresa going to keep Sonia safe? (p. 196)
2. How are Oscar and Teresa protecting Sonia? (p. 197-198)
3. Who finds Sonia at Casa Masón? (p. 201-202)

Chapter 28:

1. Who is Iguana? What has he likely done with Rafael? (p. 208-209)
2. What will they have to do to get Rafael back? What does Sonia agree to do to get the ransom? (p. 210-213)

Chapter 29:

1. What story does Sonia tell Pancho? How does Pancho respond to

Sonia's revelation? (p. 217-218)

Chapter 30:

1. What does Sonia do to get the money for the ransom? Does she steal from Casa Masón? (p. 221-223)

Chapter 31:

1. What does Sonia find when she arrives home? How have her parents changed? (p. 226)
2. Does Mongo find Rafael? What condition is he in when they arrive at the Ocampos? (p. 227-228)
3. How do the villagers respond to what has happened to Rafael? What do they now realize about Sonia? (p. 228-229)
4. What is poisoning Tres Montes? How does Sonia describe it? (p. 232)
5. Who comes to take Rafael away? What does she do to make it easier on Sonia and her parents? (p. 233-234)

Chapter 32:

1. Why do you think Sonia lets Abuela's shawl fly away? What does it symbolize for Sonia? (p. 239-240)
2. What do they do with all of the milagros? (p. 241)

Chapter 33:

1. What does Sonia do with the money that couldn't save her brother? Do you think he would have liked what she did? (p. 243)
2. What do they call the tree with the milagros now? What is its function in the community? (p. 243)
3. What does Oscar send Sonia? What is she able to do with it? (p. 244)
4. What becomes of Pancho? (p. 244)

**Reflective
Writing
Questions**

While we normally write our own reflective writing questions, Meg Medina has provided excellent discussion questions in the guide available for free on her website. I've copied them below, but you can find the [guide](http://megmedina.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/discussion-guide-the-girl-who-could-silence-the-wind-by-meg-medina.pdf) in its entirety at <http://megmedina.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/discussion-guide-the-girl-who-could-silence-the-wind-by-meg-medina.pdf>

Responsibilities:

1. Sonia shoulders many burdens for her family and community. What examples can you think of in real life where young people face very adult burdens?
2. Irina Gomez and Señora Masón are just two of the novel's characters who have low expectations of Sonia and her classmates. Has anyone ever had low expectations of you or your ability? What impact did that have on you? Are heavy expectations ever a good thing? Why or why not?

Relationships:

1. There are many romantic relationships in this novel, each very different from the other. Sonia and Pancho. Dalia and Rafael. Oscar and Blanca Ocampo. Teresa and Oscar. Conchita and Capitán Fermin. Umberto and the object of his various attentions. Whose relationship was the most interesting to you? Which was the healthiest and why? Which was the most troubling?
2. If you were to go on a date with someone from the novel, who would it be? Why?
3. Throughout the novel, we meet people who make personal gain in unsavory situations. Who are the opportunists in the novel? What qualities do they share?
4. Who is the most heroic person in the novel? Why?

Risks:

1. What is harder, keeping a bad secret or revealing one? Explain or give examples.
2. Young people often take risks. Why do the young people of Tres Montes want to leave the village? In your opinion, is it worth the risk to leave? What risks do you see your peers take? How do you know when a risk is worthwhile?

Dreams:

1. Sonia eventually learns the importance of shaping a dream for herself. What is one dream you have for yourself? If you could fashion a milagro to ask for that wish, what shape would you create?

ABOUT US & THIS GUIDE

The Latin American & Iberian Institute (LAI) receives resources from the U.S. Department of Education to support K-12 teaching about Latin America. Our goal is to provide a supportive environment for teaching across grade levels and subject areas so educators 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. This guide was prepared by Katrina Dillon, LAI Project Assistant, and Neoshia Roemer, LAI Graduate Assistant.

To complement this guide, the LAI oversees the **Vamos a Leer blog**, which provides a space for exploring how to use literature to teach about Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latinos in the United States. In addition to promoting discussion, the blog shares relevant resources and curriculum materials. Visit the blog at the following address: <http://bit.ly/vamosaleer>.

