

# Felita

by Nicholasa Mohr

## Classroom Favorites



Teacher's Guide by Kathy Sammis

A Perma-Bound Production

### SYNOPSIS

Eight-year-old Felita Maldonado is nervous and unhappy about moving day. Ever since she can remember, Felita has lived in her crowded, busy, friendly urban neighborhood with Mami, Papi, and her two older brothers Tito and Johnny. Now she must leave her dear friends Paquito, Consuela and, worst of all, Gigi, who is like a sister. Mami and Papi are moving the family to an apartment in a better neighborhood with better schools. Tito says there are no other Puerto Ricans in their new neighborhood.

After a week in the new apartment, Felita finally summons up the courage to go outside to play in the street, which is cleaner and quieter than her old block. A group of girls playing hopscotch and jump rope invite Felita to join in. They all play happily together for a long time, but then the girls' parents call them over and talk with them. When a suddenly frightened Felita tries to run back into her apartment building, the adults insult her family and the girls punch and hit her, telling her to go back to her own kind. She escapes upstairs to her apartment. Mami counsels Felita not to hate these bullies, who are surely just a few troublemakers, but Felita remains hurt and angry.

Mami and Papi are determined to stick it out until people in the new neighborhood get used to them, but the nasty incidents continue. A gang of older boys beat up Johnny, the family's mailbox is vandalized, and no one speaks to the Maldonados except the landlord, who says it would be best for everyone if the family moved out. When Mami is attacked with water-filled sacks thrown from the top of her building, the decision is made to go back to the barrio.

Felita and her brothers are thrilled to be back on their old block. After a welcome-back dinner at the apartment of her beloved grandmother and Tío Jorge, Felita stays overnight with Abuelita and finally talks about the violent incident and how much it disturbs her that she never got back at the girls. As usual, Abuelita helps Felita to solve her problem, counseling the little girl to feel strong and worthy inside and stand up to bullies in the future by declaring her ethnic pride. She soothes Felita to sleep talking about the beautiful bouquets she used to make from flowers she would pick in her native Puerto Rico.

That summer, Felita learns about the dangers of closely packed wooden tenements when fire erupts on her block and Mami rushes the entire family out on the street, afraid the fire might sweep to neighboring structures. Fortunately, only the neighborhood candy store is destroyed, and Old Bernie, its owner, survives.

That fall, Felita experiences the pain of a broken friendship when Gigi tries to discourage Felita from trying out for the lead

role of Priscilla in the school Thanksgiving play and then auditions for and wins the part herself. Felita is furious that her best friend didn't tell her she wanted the part, so Felita stops speaking to Gigi, even though this makes Felita unhappy. Again, Abuelita helps the girl recognize her true feelings—hurt, not anger—and find a solution: ask Gigi why she'd kept her plans secret. Gigi says it's because Felita is better at most everything, so for once, Gigi wanted something for herself without having to compete with Felita for it and lose. The friendship is restored, with Felita and Gigi once again telling each other everything they think and feel.

In early spring, Abuelita becomes very sick and has a final chat with Felita before entering the hospital. Paquito is beginning to act like an annoying boy rather than a fun playmate, Felita complains, and Abuelita reassures her that even though she and the other girls won't be playing with Paquito any more for now, they will be good friends with him again when they are all older. Felita and Abuelita hug for a long time; the old lady dies later that spring. Felita hopes to visit Puerto Rico with Tío Jorge sometime and pick a bouquet of the beautiful flowers for Abuelita, whose memory will be alive in Felita forever.

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nicholasa Mohr was born in New York City's El Barrio (Spanish Harlem) in 1939. Her mother, Nicholasa Rivera, had emigrated to New York from Puerto Rico earlier in the 1930s. After marrying a Spanish Basque seaman, Pedro Golpe, she brought her four young sons to New York from Puerto Rico, and the couple had two more sons and a daughter, Nicholasa. From an early age, the girl created space and adventure for herself amidst bleak economic circumstances by drawing and writing. By junior high school, both her parents were dead and the family scattered. Nicholasa lived with relatives, attended a trade high school, and was finally able to study painting and drawing at the Art Students' League in New York City. A semester studying art, printmaking, and the great muralists in Mexico deeply affected this artist's direction toward making statements about her ethnic experiences and the social status and conditions of her people. In New York, she continued her studies at the Brooklyn Museum, the Pratt Institute, and the New School for Social Research. She married Irwin Mohr, a clinical psychiatrist, in 1957; they had two sons. In 1970 the Mohr family moved to an old house in Teaneck, New Jersey. After Irwin's death in 1978, Nicholasa moved to Brooklyn, where she continues to live. By 1972 Mohr was a successful printmaker. Her artworks, filled with words, letters, and numbers (graffiti) inspired the suggestion that she write about her experiences growing up

Puerto Rican and female in New York City. The result was Mohr's first, autobiographical novel, *Nilda*, about growing up in El Barrio in the 1940s. From then on, Mohr dedicated her artistic expression mainly to writing, in effect drawing and painting with words to give a wide audience an understanding of the Puerto Rican-New York (Nuyorican) culture, especially as experienced by females.

### CRITICS' CORNER

From her first novel, *Nilda*, Mohr's work has been critically praised and recognized with a variety of awards. Mohr has established a singular position for herself as the voice of the urban female Nuyorican (New York-Puerto Rican) expressing the struggles of her people to establish themselves in a society often hostile to their culture. Critics admire Mohr's evocation of the spirit of family and neighborhood in the barrios she writes about, and the strength and sympathy of her character depictions. *Booklist* found Felita's episodic story "engaging," adding that "Felita's presence is lively and strong." *Horn Book* liked the novel's "strong characters" and called the book "significant for its honest, realistic view of an important aspect of contemporary American life." The *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* concluded, "characterization and relationships are drawn with insight and warmth, and Mohr gives a good picture of family solidarity and community conviviality."

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To gain an understanding of some aspects of the New York-Puerto Rican (Nuyorican) experience and culture
2. To discuss the nature and origin of prejudices and ways in which prejudice can be overcome
3. To consider the anxieties that surround moving from a comfortable, familiar neighborhood to an entirely new and different one
4. To identify elements of a loving, supportive family environment
5. To examine the important role an older, supportive adult can play in a child's life
6. To explore some of the problems that can disrupt a friendship, and ways to repair the damage

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the reasons for Felita's family's move to the neighborhood, and their move back to the old neighborhood
2. To note the ways in which the author expresses the urban Puerto Rican (Nuyorican) experience and culture
3. To analyze the role Abuelita plays in Felita's life and the ways in which she helps the girl resolve problems
4. To identify the reasons why Felita prefers her old neighborhood
5. To understand why Felita breaks off her friendship with Gigi, and how and why she repairs the break
6. To analyze the relationships among members of Felita's family
7. To trace Felita's growth in knowledge and understanding through the events of the novel
8. To apply a critical eye to the structure of the novel

### MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular

meaning in the novel. Explain each as it relates to the book. Use the page numbers given in parentheses to reread the term in context if you wish.

1. tapestry of the Last Supper (p. 14)  
(A *tapestry* is a heavy woven textile, usually with a complicated pictorial design, used mainly for wall hangings. Mami is very proud of her beautiful tapestry that has a picture of the Last Supper, the meal Jesus shared with his disciples the night before his crucifixion.)
2. down by the stoop (p. 15)  
A *stoop* is a small porch, platform or entrance stairway at the door of a house or apartment building. In urban neighborhoods like Felita's barrio, people often gather at and sit on their buildings' stoops to meet, chat, play cards, observe the local goings-on, and so forth.)
3. "He'll take overtime, if he can get it." (p. 15)  
(*Overtime* is working time beyond the regular day's or week's working hours; it is also the wage paid for working overtime. The move to the new neighborhood is expensive, so Papi works overtime whenever he's given the opportunity to do so.)
4. secondhand (p. 16)  
(*Secondhand* goods are things that aren't new, that have been owned/used by another person before you acquire them. In a poor neighborhood like Felita's, people often are happy to be able to buy good but cheaper secondhand articles at Mr. Goldstein's store.)
5. bodega (p. 18)  
(A *bodega* is a combined wineshop and grocery store. Doña Josefina runs the bodega on Felita's block, and Felita looks forward to a final taste of Doña Josefina's delicious dulce de coco the night before the big move.)
6. "You look like a gringo yourself." (p. 23)  
(*Gringo* is a generally disparaging term for a foreigner in Spain or Latin America, especially an English or U.S. foreigner. Consuela tells Tito, who like his father has very pale pink skin and blond hair, that he looks like the Irish and German people in his new neighborhood, so he should fit right in. Tito responds emphatically that he may look like a gringo, but he's Puerto Rican!)
7. "The super told us the landlord wants to see us." (p. 46)  
(The *super* is the superintendent of the building, the person who is in charge of day-to-day running of the building; superintendents of apartment buildings often live in the buildings themselves. Since he is the one on hand, he is the one Felita's parents go to to complain about the attack on Johnny. The landlord is the person who owns the house or apartment that another person leases or rents. The landlord knew from the beginning that he was renting to a Puerto Rican family. Now that there's trouble, he recommends that the Maldonados move out.)
8. one small shelf altar...a framed holy picture (p. 57)  
(An *altar* is a raised place where incense or candles are burned in worship, often in front of a holy picture, a picture of a Catholic saint, the Virgin Mary, or Jesus. Devout Catholics, especially those from traditional cultures like Abuelita, often have small altars and holy pictures in their homes.)

9. On real hot evenings we opened the fire hydrant. (p. 63)  
(On very hot evenings in dense urban neighborhoods, authorities may allow neighborhood residents to open the fire hydrants, which discharge water into the streets to give sweltering city dwellers some relief from the heat. Felita and her friends enjoy playing in the fire hydrant spray.)
10. tenements (p. 66)  
(Tenements are apartment houses that meet only minimum standards of safety, sanitation, and comfort; they are occupied by poorer people in cities. The buildings in Felita's old neighborhood are tenements.)
11. arson (p. 77)  
(Arson is the deliberate setting of a fire, out of malice or for insurance fraud purposes. The people on Felita's block worry that the fire at Old Bernie's might be arson. Having someone in the neighborhood who sets fires deliberately would be a major safety concern, because of all the old wooden buildings that everyone lives in.)
12. the Pilgrims (p. 79)  
(The Pilgrims were the English colonists who settled at Plymouth in 1620, founding what became the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Thanksgiving play that causes the rift between Felita and Gigi is about the Pilgrims, specifically Priscilla, Miles Standish, and John Alden.)
13. agreed to help with the sets (p. 79)  
(A set is the constructed setting for a scene of a theater production. Felita designs most of the sets for the Thanksgiving play, and they contribute greatly to the play's success.)

### COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important, and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

#### Questions 1-4 Literal Level

1. Describe the members of Felita's family.  
(Mami has light brown skin and black curly hair; she is the homemaker and cares for the children. Papi is blond and has very pale pink skin; he works repairing heavy machinery and is very strong. Both Mami and Papi are very concerned about the welfare of their children and want to give them the advantage of better schools to help them have a better future. Johnny is thirteen and looks like Mami; he is by nature quiet, and he's very smart and does well in school. Tito is twelve and looks like Papi; he speaks his mind and tends to goof off and hang out with his friends. Felita is eight and is a physical mix of her mother and father; she is bright and engaging. Abuelita, Papi's mother, and her brother Tío Jorge live together in another apartment; they are natives of Puerto Rico. Abuelita is loving and wise, a source of advice and comfort for Felita. Tío Jorge is quiet and very kind to the children.)
2. Why do Felita's parents move to the new neighborhood?  
(It is a better neighborhood, with less crime, so it should be safer for the family, and the children—Tito especially—will be much less likely to fall in with a bad crowd. More importantly, it has better schools, which means Tito will get the discipline he needs, and the children can go on to better

high schools and then college. This is the best thing for the children's futures, Mami and Papi are convinced.)

3. What incidents in the new neighborhood eventually cause Felita's family to move back to the old neighborhood?  
(On her first venture out into the new neighborhood, the girls who initially accept Felita and play with her then turn on her when their parents stir up their prejudices. The girls hit and punch Felita as she fights her way back into her building. Then a gang of older boys beats up Johnny. The Maldonados' mailbox is broken into and their mail scattered. When water bags are thrown at Mami from the top of the building, the family decides to leave. "Either they will harm us or I will end up by hurting someone badly," Papi says. "It's time to leave.")
4. What aspects of Puerto Rican culture are part of Felita's life?  
(The family speaks English as well as Spanish. They eat Puerto Rican foods like flan and dulce de coco. They express their Catholic religion by Mami's hanging tapestry of the Last Supper and Abuelita's wall altar and holy picture. Felita's old neighborhood is a typical Nuyorican barrio, with lots of people, noise, music, and conviviality on the street. Felita's abuelita speaks only Spanish and plans to take Felita to Puerto Rico some day.)

#### Questions 5-7 Interpretive Level

5. What is Felita's reaction to the violent attack on her by the new neighborhood's girls? How does Abuelita help Felita come to terms with this?  
(Felita is scared, and hurt, and angry. She wants to hurt the girls back, and she also feels bad that she couldn't stand up for herself, that she didn't say anything back to the mean girls. Abuelita confirms that Felita acted bravely but that trying to hurt those girls now won't do any good. What Felita can do, Abuelita advises, is be prepared for the future. Felita learns from Abuelita that she can respond to future bullies by declaring how beautiful the Puerto Rican people are, how accomplished she is to be able to speak two languages, and that Puerto Ricans—mainland or island—are all U.S. citizens. Also, Felita learns that if she has inner strength and self-esteem and knows that no one is better than anyone else because of how they look, then prejudiced people cannot truly harm her.)
6. What role does Abuelita play in Felita's life?  
(Abuelita is Felita's source of knowledge and comfort, and she is Felita's model of love and patience. Abuelita is Felita's confidante and advisor; with her air of calm acceptance and sympathy, and her lack of prying questions, Abuelita inspires Felita to open up and talk about her problems and confused feelings. Then, with gentle guidance and soft questions, Abuelita leads Felita to an understanding and solutions. Abuelita is Felita's source of unbounded love, accepting the little girl with warmth and patience even when the child is being what everyone else considers a pest.)
7. Compare Felita's old and new neighborhoods. Why does Felita prefer her old neighborhood?  
(Felita's old neighborhood is crowded, noisy, friendly, and sometimes unsafe. Muggings and beatings are a hazard.

*The new neighborhood is quieter and cleaner, with hardly any small stores, and not so many people or kids outside; this is a "better" neighborhood with better schools—and no other Puerto Rican families. Felita prefers her old neighborhood because it is familiar [she knows almost everyone on her block] and friendly, and she is back among her good friends and fellow New York-Puerto Ricans where she does not feel strange being Puerto Rican. The people in the new neighborhood were hostile toward Felita and her family because of their being Puerto Rican.)*

#### Questions 8-10 Critical Level

8. How does the author create a picture of family strength and solidarity in this novel?

*(Felita's parents are very concerned about their children and their children's futures. They worry about Tito needing more discipline at a better school; they plan for Johnny to go on to college and become a scientist; they are sick and angry about Felita and Johnny being attacked in the new neighborhood. When the attacks threaten the family's safety, everyone agrees to move back to the old neighborhood. Tito teases Felita but Johnny protects her. Felita gets annoyed with Mami but expresses love for her mother, and she and Abuelita adore each other. Felita, her brothers, and her parents enjoy a warm, loving relationship with the older family members in New York, Abuelita and Tío Jorge, Papi's mother and uncle, who live together. When Abuelita has to enter the hospital, Tío Jorge calls the family together, and each family member in turn has a final chat with the old lady.)*

9. How do Felita's experiences in the new neighborhood, her quarrel with Gigi, and the death of Abuelita help her grow in understanding about human nature and about herself?

*(From the violence and prejudice in the new neighborhood, Felita learns to take pride in her ethnic background and to be strong inside, believing no one is better than she is just because of ethnicity; she also learns that some people are mean and bullies, but that everyone shares the same basic feelings and wants. From the fight with Gigi, Felita learns the value of friendship, and how you shouldn't let it slip away because of a misunderstanding. The death of Abuelita introduces Felita to grief and to the understanding that someone you love is with you forever, even after death.)*

10. Do you think the first part of the novel (about Felita's family's move to the new neighborhood and the experiences that cause them to move back their old neighborhood) stands too much apart from the rest of the book? Does this seem like one unified story or two separate stories to you?

*(Answers will vary.)*

#### Questions 11-14 Creative Level

11. Suppose Felita's family decided **not** to move out of their new neighborhood. Describe what would have happened over the course of the next year.

*(Answers will vary.)*

12. Write some diary entries for Gigi starting with Miss Lovett's announcement about the Thanksgiving play.

*(Answers will vary.)*

13. Write a scene between Mami and Papi when they discuss the pros and cons of leaving their old neighborhood for the

new one.

*(Answers will vary.)*

14. Write a scene in which Felita encounters some of the girls from the new neighborhood again, after her talk about them with Abuelita.

*(Answers will vary.)*

#### LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

To enhance students' appreciation and understanding of the novel, present them with these terms.

An **autobiographical novel** is a novel that draws largely from the author's own life experiences. Nicholasa Mohr was born in New York's El Barrio to a Puerto Rican mother and a Spanish Basque father and grew up with her six older brothers in difficult economic circumstances in the Bronx, experiencing much prejudice along the way. These life experiences are clearly reflected in Felita. Suggest that students read the articles about Mohr in the *Something About the Author Autobiography Series* and the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (see **Bibliography**) and identify parallels themselves.

**Episodic structure** is a narrative that consists of a succession of loosely connected episodes, or incidents, rather than an integrated plot. The episodes are held together by sharing the same central character. In Felita, the first section of the novel (Chapters 1-3) is integrated, being the story of the Maldonados' move to the new neighborhood, the incidents there that drive them back to their old neighborhood, and Felita's absorption of these events. The remaining chapters of the novel are held together only by the continuing presence of Felita and her family and friends. Chapter 4 is about a fire on Felita's block, Chapters 5 and 6 are about the temporary split in the friendship between Felita and Gigi, and Chapter 7 is about Abuelita's death.

**First-person narration** is the telling of a novel or short story from the point of view of only one person, in that person's voice. In this novel, eight-year-old Felita tells the story, and her rather childish voice rings true. We can experience her confused feelings and the ways in which Abuelita guides her through them. Ask students how the novel would be different in another voice, especially that of an impersonal narrator. Would it be less immediate and effective?

**Nuyorican** is a term that refers to New York-Puerto Rican experience and culture. Nicholasa Mohr is a Nuyorican writer, expressing through her work the urban Puerto Rican experience in the United States, with a particular emphasis on presenting the female perspective on this experience.

A **theme** is a controlling idea expressed through a work's events. The first part of Felita expresses the theme of prejudice. The second part of the novel, somewhat loosely connected to the first part, expresses themes of friendship difficulties and dealing with death and grief.

#### ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

##### Science

1. Create an illustrated nature guide to the common flora (and fauna, if you wish) of Puerto Rico. (Also *Art*.)
2. Make a poster or a booklet explaining the physical nature of fire, the chemical reactions that take place in a typical building fire, and the means used to control various types of

fires. (Also *Art*)

### **Social Studies/Geography**

1. Write an illustrated report about the history and geography of Puerto Rico. Or create a travel brochure for a visit to Puerto Rico. (Also *Art*)
2. On a map of the United States, locate major centers of Hispanic populations and, within that, of Puerto Rican populations.
3. Conduct an oral interview with an older family member (or another older person you know) about his or her experiences growing up, with emphasis on the differences and similarities between those times and today. (Also *Language Arts*.)
4. Write a report about life in El Barrio, New York City's Spanish Harlem.
5. With classmates, present a skit about the life of St. Francis of Assisi.
6. Give a written or oral report on a notable Puerto Rican.

### **Art**

1. Create a class display about Puerto Rico.
2. Create an artwork showing Felita and Gigi at the birthday party, wearing their matching dresses.

### **Mathematics**

1. On a map, trace the journey from Puerto Rico to New York. Calculate how many miles this trip covers. How long would it take by boat? by air?
2. Create a graph showing the growth in people of Hispanic background among the U.S. population and another graph showing the rise in numbers of Puerto Ricans living on the U.S. mainland. Calculate what percentage of the total U.S. population is represented by the population figures from these graphs, and by what total numbers and percentages those populations have grown.
3. Johnny tells Felita it would take about twenty minutes fast walking time or half an hour slow walking time to get from their new neighborhood to their old neighborhood. How far apart are the two neighborhoods?
4. Identify something you or a friend would like to buy that you can't now afford. Then calculate how much overtime you or your friend would have to work to earn enough overtime money to pay for that thing.

### **Music**

Play recordings for the class, or perform with classmates, some traditional and contemporary Puerto Rican songs and music, including salsa.

### **Language Arts**

1. Create a glossary of Spanish words from the novel. List each Spanish word, and give its meaning in English. You can add other common Spanish words you know to your glossary.
2. List and discuss some other books you have read or know about that deal with the experiences of Puerto Ricans growing up and/or living on the U.S. mainland.
3. Read "The Courtship of Miles Standish," or parts of it, and other poems by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.
4. Read *Going Home*, the sequel to *Felita*. What new types of prejudice and cultural conflict do you find in this novel?

5. Find and correct at least ten instances of incorrect grammar in the novel's dialogue.

### **Home Economics**

1. With classmates, prepare some traditional Puerto Rican foods that Felita enjoys, like flan and dulce de coco.
2. For yourself or a younger child, create or design a party dress like the ones Felita and Gigi wear at the birthday party.

### **STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES**

1. Teach a group of younger children how to play hopscotch and jump rope.
2. Take part in a class debate about the status of Puerto Rico, taking one of the following positions:
  - Puerto Rico should become a state
  - Puerto Rico should remain a commonwealth of the United States
  - Puerto Rico should become an independent nation.
3. With classmates, stage your own play based on "The Courtship of Miles Standish."
4. With other classmates who have moved from one home to another, discuss your experiences in adjusting to your new neighborhood and feelings about leaving your old one.
5. Plan a child's birthday party, complete with magic tricks.
6. Have you ever watched firefighters working to put out a fire? Describe what you saw. Or, tour a fire station and talk to the firefighters about their job.
7. Do you have a grandparent or other older person who is very special in your life? Describe this relationship in a short essay.
8. Develop an escape plan for your family in case of a fire at your home.
9. Discuss in class the origins and nature of prejudice, and ways to deal with and overcome it.
10. View the video *West Side Story*, and discuss its message in class.

### **ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT**

1. Make a list of the novel's main characters. Next to each name, note physical and personality characteristics, the relationship of that person to Felita, and the part that person plays in the novel.
2. Detail the pros and cons of Felita's old and new neighborhoods.
3. Summarize the four main episodes of the novel.
4. Trace the ways in which Felita gains knowledge and understanding through the novel's events.

### **OTHER BOOKS BY NICHOLASA MOHR**

*Nilda* (1973)  
*El Bronx Remembered* (1975)  
*In Nueva York* (1977)  
*Felita* (1979)  
*Going Home* (a sequel to *Felita*) (1986)  
*All for the Better: A Story of El Barrio* (1993)  
*The Song of el Coqui & Other Tales of Puerto Rico* (1995)  
*The Magic Shell* (1995)  
*Old Letivia & the Mountain of Sorrows* (1996)

## RELATED READING

- Ada, Alma F. *My Name Is Maria Isabel*  
Calstrom, Nancy White. *Light: Stories of a Small Kindness*  
Cervantes, Esther De Michael and Alex. *Barrio Ghosts*  
Gonzales, Gloria. *Gaicho*  
Harlan, Judith. *The Hispanic Voters: A Voice in American Politics*  
Kent, Deborah. *America the Beautiful: Puerto Rico*  
Larsen, Ronald J. *The Puerto Ricans in America*  
Meltzer, Milton. *The Hispanic Americans*  
Nelson, Vaunda M. *Mayfield Crossing*  
Perera, Hilda. *Kiki: A Cuban Boy's Adventures in America.*  
Soto, Gary. *Baseball in April And Other Stories; Local News; The Skirt; and Taking Sides*  
Stanek, Muriel. *I Speak English for My Mom*

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*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, December 1979, pp. 75-76.  
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*Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vol. 12. Detroit: Gale, 1980.  
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*Horn Book*, February 1980, p. 56.  
Natov, Roni, and Geraldine DeLuca. "An Interview with Nicholasa Mohr." *The Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature*, April 1987, pp. 116-121.  
Schon, Isabel. *A Hispanic Heritage, Series IV: A Guide to Juvenile Books About Hispanic People and Cultures*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1991.  
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Zarnowski, Myra. "An Interview with Author Nicholasa Mohr." *The Reading Teacher*, October 1991, pp. 100-105.

## TEACHER'S NOTES

## VOCABULARY TEST

Match each word in boldface with its meaning listed below. Write the letter of the meaning in the space next to the sentence number.

- |                   |                         |                 |                     |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| a. control        | f. broken-down          | k. try out for  | p. gathered closely |
| b. hauling        | g. get back             | l. smells       | q. push             |
| c. sick, nauseous | h. letter-writing paper | m. store        | r. thugs            |
| d. fuss           | i. restored             | n. very unhappy | s. controlled       |
| e. moving around  | j. offered to help      | o. steal        | t. poke             |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The new store sold mostly magazines, comic books, newspapers, greeting cards, and **stationery**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Miss Lovett said we could all **audition** for the different parts in the play.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Mami swallowed and composed herself a little.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. One afternoon, Mami was returning from the supermarket **lugging** her heavy shopping cart.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Doña Josefina always watched to make sure we didn't **swipe** some of her delicious candy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. "These buildings were old half a century ago. Now they're **decrepit** fire traps."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. At my new home I stayed indoors most of the time. Mami didn't **urge** me to go outside.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I wouldn't be shopping here again. I felt **miserable**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Papi said that Tito needs a good school more than anybody else because he needs the **discipline**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. After it rained, especially, I could smell springtime. I don't know why exactly, but all the different **odors** lingered longer then.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Papi went over to Tito playfully and began to box around him and **jab** him gently.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. There was still a lot of **commotion** near the candy store.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. The sign outside read: GOLDSTEIN'S HOUSEHOLD MART—NEW AND USED BARGAINS.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. The whole store had been **renovated**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. The other girls **huddled** with the grownups.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. My stomach felt **queasy**. Oh, here it comes!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. "Some **hoodlums** did this," Mami answered. "And we are going to find out who they are."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Consuela was going to work on makeup. Gigi had not **volunteered** for anything.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. People were **milling** about and trying to get a look inside the burned store.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Old Bernie had to retire. Mami and Papi said he couldn't **recover** his losses.

## COMPREHENSION TEST A

### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each character description. In the list below, find the character who matches the description. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the description number. You will use each name only once.

- |           |            |         |             |               |
|-----------|------------|---------|-------------|---------------|
| a. Felita | c. Mami    | e. Papi | g. Abuelita | i. Old Bernie |
| b. Johnny | d. Paquito | f. Gigi | h. Tito     | j. Tío Jorge  |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Very strong; works at a big food plant way downtown.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Quiet by nature and very smart; is going to be a scientist.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Felita's best friend, like a sister, only five months older.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Is always asking questions about every little thing that happens to Felita.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Owns the candy store and has a cat named Mr. Roosevelt.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Has real white hair and a face with many, many lines.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Used to be so nice, but now is acting like a pest, like all the other boys.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Quiet and doesn't talk much, but is very nice to the kids.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Looks like a mixture of Mami and Papi.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Always speaks his mind, and likes to goof off and hang out a lot.

### Part II: Fill-In (30 points)

Write one or two words in each blank to make each statement true.

1. Georgina is better known by her nickname, \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Abuelita is a Spanish word for \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Doña Josefina runs the local bodega, or \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Felita plays the sidewalk game of \_\_\_\_\_ with some girls in her new neighborhood.
5. Tío Jorge has a great collection of \_\_\_\_\_ that Felita enjoys looking at.
6. Abuelita's favorite saint, Saint Francis of Assisi, is the patron saint of \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Felita yearns for a yellow \_\_\_\_\_ just like Gigi's.
8. Mr. Perez's cheaperia is actually a \_\_\_\_\_ store.
9. Abuelita tells Felita to be proud of her \_\_\_\_\_ heritage.
10. Miss Lovett is Felita's \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Felita designs the \_\_\_\_\_ for the Thanksgiving play at school.
12. Abuelita is Papi's mother, and Tío Jorge is Papi's \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Mami is scared when someone drops bags of \_\_\_\_\_ down at her from high in the building.
14. Felita speaks two languages, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
15. Felita enjoys a trip back to her old neighborhood to attend Gigi's \_\_\_\_\_.



**Part III: True/False (20 points)**

In the spaces provided, write **T** if the statement is completely true, or write **F** if any part of the statement is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Felita has a little sister named Joanie.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. People in the new neighborhood call Felita and her family “spicks.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Felita loves to eat the delicious flan Abuelita makes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Felita’s family moves from their cramped apartment to a larger rented house in a better neighborhood.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Abuelita helps Felita solve many problems.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Felita doesn’t want to try out for the lead role in the Thanksgiving play.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Old Bernie dies in the fire.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Mami tells Felita not to be angry at the girls and adults who hurt Felita.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Mami and Papi have plans for at least some of their children to go to college.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Abuelita and Tío Jorge have lived together for many years.

**Part IV: Essay (30 points)**

Choose any three to answer. Write a paragraph for each.

1. Why does Felita’s family move to the new neighborhood? Why do they move back to the old neighborhood?
2. Who is Paquito? What part does he play in the novel?
3. Write a character description of Felita.
4. Describe Felita’s relationship with her mother. Why is she able to talk with Abuelita more easily than with Mami?

## COMPREHENSION TEST B

### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each quotation. In the list below, find the character who spoke the words. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the quotation number. Use each name only once.

- |           |         |                |             |              |
|-----------|---------|----------------|-------------|--------------|
| a. Felita | c. Mami | e. Gigi        | g. Abuelita | i. Mary Beth |
| b. Papi   | d. Tito | f. Miss Lovett | h. Johnny   | j. Tío Jorge |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. "Why don't you stay with your own kind?"
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. "Either they will harm us or I will end up by hurting someone badly. It's time to leave."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. "Everything you do is always better than...what I do! I wanted to be better than you this time."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. "Now whatever is troubling your mind like this must come out. Tell me, Felita."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. "I tell you, Alberto, I wish we could move away from here."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. "Felita, before you go back home, I have some nature cards to show you."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. "A gang of big guys, around fifteen and sixteen years old, walked up to me when I was coming into our building and began to hit me."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. "I just walked away, you know? I wish I could go back and beat them all up! And also tell them off. I would like to hurt them just like they hurt me."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. "You are designing the stage sets and you're assistant stage manager. I think that's quite a bit. You know, you can't be the best in everything."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. "I may look like a gringo, but I'm Puerto Rican. And them that don't like it can shove it."

### Part II: Short Answer (30 points)

Write a one- or two-word answer to each of the following questions.

1. What kind of a store does Old Bernie run? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is Felita's last name? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the name of the person whom Gigi plays in the Thanksgiving show? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Whose real, formal name is Felicidad? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How is Abuelita related to Felita (what relative of Felita's is she)? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How many brothers does Felita have? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is Abuelita's native land? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What is it Papi's job to repair? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What sidewalk game is Felita very good at? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What thing belonging to Felita's family gets broken into in the new neighborhood?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Who or what is Mr. Roosevelt? \_\_\_\_\_
12. What does Felita plan to pick for Abuelita some day? \_\_\_\_\_
13. What country are members of Felita's family citizens of? \_\_\_\_\_
14. What event in her old neighborhood terrifies Felita? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Who is the author of this book? \_\_\_\_\_

**Part III: True/False (20 points)**

In the spaces provided, write T if the statement is completely true, or write F if any part of the statement is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Because her family moves to a new neighborhood, Felita can't attend her best friend's birthday party.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Felita and her family are the only Puerto Ricans in their new neighborhood.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Felita's old neighborhood is a safe place to live.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Felita feels her Mami understands her better than her Abuelita.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Everyone admires the scenery Felita designs for the school play.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Abuelita returns to her native land to die.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Even Mami is attacked by the people in the new neighborhood.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Tío Jorge is the uncle of Felita's family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Gigi and Felita decided to become sisters when they were little.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Felita and her brothers are glad to move out of their old neighborhood.

**Part IV: Essay (30 points)**

Choose any three to answer. Write a paragraph for each.

- 1. What causes the break in the friendship between Felita and Gigi? How do they make up?
- 2. Write a character description of Mami.
- 3. What advice does Abuelita give Felita on dealing with prejudiced people like those in the new neighborhood?
- 4. In what ways does Felita grow in knowledge and understanding in the course of the novel?

## ANSWER KEY

### VOCABULARY TEST

- |       |       |
|-------|-------|
| 1. h  | 11. t |
| 2. k  | 12. d |
| 3. s  | 13. m |
| 4. b  | 14. i |
| 5. o  | 15. p |
| 6. f  | 16. c |
| 7. q  | 17. r |
| 8. n  | 18. j |
| 9. a  | 19. e |
| 10. l | 20. g |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. e | 6. g  |
| 2. b | 7. d  |
| 3. f | 8. j  |
| 4. c | 9. a  |
| 5. i | 10. h |

#### Part II: Fill-In (30 points)

- |                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Gigi                 | 9. Puerto Rican (ethnic) |
| 2. grandmother (granny) | 10. teacher              |
| 3. grocery store        | 11. scenery/sets         |
| 4. hopscotch/jump rope  | 12. uncle                |
| 5. nature cards         | 13. water                |
| 6. animals              | 14. Spanish, English     |
| 7. party dress          | 15. birthday party       |
| 8. secondhand           |                          |

#### Part III: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F  |
| 2. T | 7. F  |
| 3. T | 8. T  |
| 4. F | 9. T  |
| 5. T | 10. T |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. i | 6. j  |
| 2. b | 7. h  |
| 3. e | 8. a  |
| 4. g | 9. f  |
| 5. c | 10. d |

#### Part II: Short Answer (30 points)

- |                    |                        |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. candy store     | 9. hopscotch/jump rope |
| 2. Maldonado       | 10. mailbox            |
| 3. Priscilla       | 11. a cat              |
| 4. Felita          | 12. flower bouquet     |
| 5. grandmother     | 13. United States      |
| 6. two             | 14. fire               |
| 7. Puerto Rico     | 15. Nicholasa Mohr     |
| 8. heavy machinery |                        |

#### Part III: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F  |
| 2. T | 7. T  |
| 3. F | 8. T  |
| 4. F | 9. T  |
| 5. T | 10. F |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

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