



How Tia Lola Came to Visit Stay

by Julia Alvarez

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Teacher's Guide

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Synopsis

Chapter 1

Ten-year-old Miguel Guzman, his seven-year-old sister Juanita, and their mother ("Mami") have moved from New York City to rural Vermont, where Mami has taken a position as a college counselor. Left behind is their beloved Papi, a painter whom their mother is divorcing. To ease the transition and to help with baby-sitting, Mami has sent for her aunt, Tia Lola, from the Dominican Republic. The family has been in Vermont for three weeks, but Miguel has yet to make a single friend. This upsets him very much. Further, no one looks like him, with black hair and brown skin.

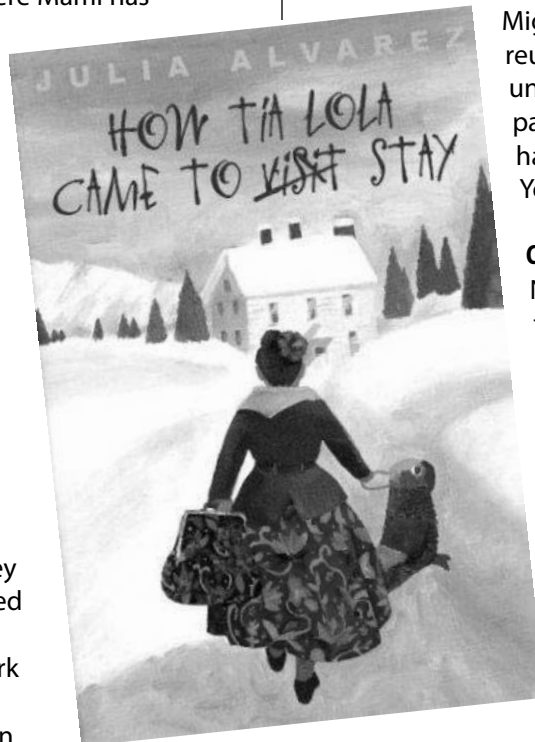
The family can't find Tia Lola at the airport, so they page her, saying "I love you very much" in Spanish. They finally find their aunt and are amazed at her brilliantly hued flower-print dress and the migrating beauty mark over her lipsticked mouth. Nonetheless, Miguel feels the love in her hug and holds on to her as hard as he can.

Chapter 2

Tia Lola practices the Santeria religion, which Miguel half-suspects gives her magical powers to affect reality. She tells great stories and cooks delicious Dominican food. Two of Miguel's classmates, Dean and Sam, come to the door collecting money for the Little League team. They invite Miguel to try out for the team in the spring. The boys think Miguel's house is haunted and appear baffled by the exotic Tia Lola. Miguel is ashamed of her foreignness and makes her feel unwelcome. To make amends, Miguel spells out "Welcome, Tia Lola" in Spanish in the new snow. Tia Lola is thrilled at the gesture.

Chapter 3

Miguel practices baseball with Dean and Sam, and vows to keep Tia Lola secret. She doesn't know any English, so Rudy, a widower who owns a local restaurant, teaches her. Rudy is much taken with the warm and exotic woman. Rudy is also the coach for the Little League team. On March 1, Mami and Tia Lola host a big surprise birthday party for Miguel. The only gift Miguel really wants is to see his parents reunited, even though he knows that is unlikely. The best part of the surprise party occurs when Papi does show up, having come to Vermont from New York for the day.



Chapter 4

Now that it's Spring, Tia Lola sets off to meet the neighbors, starting with Tom and Becky on the sheep farm next door. Then she makes huevos rancheros for their cranky landlord, Colonel Charlebois, who is not satisfied with the eggs that Rudy has made. The Colonel loves Tia Lola's cooking, however. Papi wins \$500 in the lottery and sends Miguel a new bat. Miguel earns a place on the baseball team and believes that it was a result of Tia Lola's magical powers.

Chapter 5

Papi drives up more often to see the children. Tia Lola makes a big garden in the shape of the Dominican Republic. Miguel and Juanita decide to teach Tia Lola English so that Mami will allow her to chaperone the kids on a trip to New York City to visit their father. To that end, the kids make large signs with useful commonplace phrases written on them. The kids think they have fooled Mami, but in a comic scene, she realizes that Tia Lola still doesn't know much English.

Chapter 6

Accompanying them on a visit to their father, Tia Lola gets lost but is soon found. The family attends a baseball game and the zoo. Tia Lola has a fabulous time visiting relatives in the old neighborhood and dancing in

the street. She names Papi's latest painting "Three Happy Days in Nueva York."

Chapter 7

The Colonel gives the kids permission to practice baseball in the back pasture. The kids are shocked to discover that Tia Lola is painting the house purple. The Colonel is furious and demands that she repaint the house its original white. She makes the ballplayers bright purple uniforms, names them "Charlie's Boys," and so mollifies the Colonel. He happily throws the ball with the players.

Chapter 8

Tia Lola organizes a huge birthday party for Mami—more than seventy people attend! Rudy's son puts up a big tent and Tia Lola cooks all the food at Rudy's restaurant. Miguel is delighted that the family has made so many friends in just eight months.

Chapter 9

After the last guest leaves, Mami, Tia Lola, Miguel, and Juanita drive up to the mountains, where they admire the beautiful scenery. Tia Lola tells a special birthday story for Mami. With her support and guidance, the kids accept that the divorce will not threaten their parents' love for them.

Chapter 10

Tia Lola decides to stay. The novel concludes with a Christmas trip to the Dominican Republic, where the children meet their mother's family for the first time and begin to accept that home is where love is.

Dominican Republic Timeline

1492	Christopher Columbus visits the island, which he names Hispaniola, "Little Spain."
1496	Spaniards establish the first Spanish colony in the Western Hemisphere at Santo Domingo, which subsequently serves as capital of all Spanish colonies in America.
1697	Treaty of Ryswick gives western part of Hispaniola island (Haiti) to France and eastern part (Santo Domingo, the present Dominican Republic) to Spain.
1795	Spain cedes its portion of Hispaniola

island to France.

1808	Spain retakes Santo Domingo following revolt by Spanish Creoles.
1821	Uprising against Spanish rule is followed by brief period of independence.
1822	Haitian President JeanPierre Boyer marches his troops into Santo Domingo and annexes it. Republic is born.
1844	Boyer overthrown; Santo Domingo declares its independence and becomes the Dominican Republic.
1861-63	President Pedro Santana returns the Dominican Republic to Spanish rule.
1863-64	Spain withdraws from Dominican Republic following a popular revolt.
1865	The second Dominican Republic proclaimed.
1906	Dominican Republic and U.S. sign 50-year treaty: U.S. takes over the republic's customs department in return for buying its debts.
1916-24	U.S. forces occupy the Dominican Republic following internal disorder.
1924	Constitutional government assumes control; U.S. forces withdraw.
1930	General Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina establishes dictatorship following the overthrow of President Vazquez.
1937	Army massacres many Haitians living in areas of the Dominican Republic adjacent to Haiti.
1960	Organization of American States adopts resolution calling for severance of diplomatic ties with the Dominican Republic.
	On November 25, three of the Mirabal sisters—Minerva, Patria, and Maria Teresa—were cornered on an isolated

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country road and beaten to death on orders of Trujillo; a fourth, Dede, was not present that day and survived to carry on her sisters' legacy. The four sisters were political activists attempting to bring about the overthrow of the Trujillo government. The brutal murder of the beautiful and patriotic sisters—known by the code-name Las Mariposas, or the Butterflies—backfired on Trujillo, sparking widespread outrage and demonstrations leading up to his assassination six months later.

1961 Trujillo assassinated. U.S. invades.

1962 Juan Bosch, founder of the leftist Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), is elected president in the first democratic elections for nearly four decades.

1963 Bosch is deposed in a military coup and replaced by a civilian junta.

1965 Approximately 30,000 U.S. troops invade the Dominican Republic following pro-Bosch uprising. Return to democracy

1966 Joaquin Balaguer, a Trujillo protégé, is elected president.

1978 Silvestre Antonio Guzman elected president; he releases 200 political prisoners, eases media censorship, and purges the armed forces of Balaguer supporters.

1979 Two hurricanes leave more than 200,000 people homeless and cause damage worth \$1 billion as the economy continues to deteriorate due to high fuel prices and low sugar prices.

1982 Jorge Blanco is elected president. Austerity and unrest result.

1985 IMF-prescribed austerity measures, including price increases for food and oil, lead to widespread riots.

1986 Balaguer is reelected president.

1988 Jorge Blanco is tried in absentia and found guilty of corruption during his presidency.

1990 Balaguer is reelected.

1994 Balaguer is reelected, but agrees to serve only a two-year term after being accused of fraud.

1996 Leonel Fernandez Reyna is elected president.

1998 Hurricane George causes widespread devastation.

2000 Hipolito Mejia is elected president.

2001 Appeals court quashes a conviction against former president Salvador Jorge Blanco on charges of corruption.

2001 U.S. jet bound for Santo Domingo crashes in New York, killing all 255 people on board.

2002 Former president Joaquin Balaguer dies; thousands pay their last respects to a man who dominated politics for more than 50 years.

2003 Deadly clashes occur between police and protesters during demonstrations against high prices, power cuts.

2004 Leonel Fernandez elected president.

Severe floods in the southwest and in parts of neighboring Haiti leave more than 2,000 dead or missing.

2005 Congress approves a proposed free-trade agreement with the U.S. and Central American nations.

Author Sketch

Julia Alvarez was born in 1950 in New York, N.Y., but raised in the Dominican Republic until she was ten years old. That year, the Alvarez family was forced to flee after the authorities discovered her father's involvement

in a plot to overthrow dictator Rafael Trujillo. Most of Alvarez's writing is semi-autobiographical, dealing both with the immigrant experience and bicultural identity.



Alvarez knew some English when the family relocated to New York, but not enough to prepare her for American schools. "When I'm asked what made me into a writer," Alvarez noted on her web page, "I point to the watershed experience of coming to this country. Not understanding the language, I had to pay close attention to each word—great training for a writer. I also discovered the welcoming world of the imagination and books. There, I sunk my new roots."

Alvarez attended Connecticut College, 1967-69, and graduated from Middlebury College with her B.A. in 1971. She earned her M.F.A. from Syracuse University in 1975.

Alvarez always wanted to be a writer, but to earn a living, she became a teacher, primarily of creative writing. For years, she traveled across the country with poetry-in-the-schools programs, working until the funds dried up in one district, and then moving on to the next one. She worked as a poet-in-the-schools in Kentucky, Delaware, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Vermont, Washington, D.C., and Illinois.

After five years of being a traveling writer, Alvarez decided to put down roots and began teaching at the high school level, moving on to college teaching, and finally, on the strength of some publications in small magazines and a couple of writing prizes, landing a tenure-track job. In 1991, she earned tenure at Middlebury College and published her first novel, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*.

Based on the success of this novel, Alvarez relinquished her position at Middlebury College, assuming the role of writer-in-residence. She continues to write novels and poems. In 1989, Alvarez married Bill Eichner, a physician and farmer. The couple grow vegetables, apples, and pears on their Vermont farm.

On her web site, Alvarez commented: "I think of myself at ten years old, newly arrived in this country, feeling out of place, feeling that I would never belong in this world of United States of Americans who were so different from me. ... And then, magic happened in my life: an English teacher asked us to write little stories about

ourselves. I began to put into words some of what my life had been like in the Dominican Republic. Stories about my gang of cousins and the smell of mangoes and the iridescent, vibrating green of hummingbirds. Since it was my own little world I was making with words, I could put what I wanted in it. I could make things up. ... I found myself turning more and more to writing as the one place where I felt I belonged and could make sense of myself, my life, all that was happening to me. I realized that I had lost the island we had come from, but with the words and encouragement of my teacher, I had discovered an even better world: the one words can create in a story or poem."

Critic's Corner

How Tia Lola Came to Visit Stay received mixed reviews. Emilie Coulter, the Amazon.com reviewer, called the novel "a funny, uplifting story." The review concludes: "Julia Alvarez writes with a warmth and humor that crosses all boundaries."

Marie Orlando, reviewing the novel for *School Library Journal*, said, "Readers will enjoy the funny situations, identify with the developing relationships and conflicting feelings of the characters, and will get a spicy taste of Caribbean culture in the bargain."

Kirkus Reviews said: "Like all good stories, this one incorporates a lesson just subtle enough that readers will forget they're being taught, but in the end will understand themselves, and others, a little better, regardless of the *la lengua nativa*—the mother tongue. Simple, bella, un regalo permanente: simple and beautiful, a gift that will stay."

On the other hand, Hazel Rochman, the *Booklist* critic, said: "Alvarez's first book for young readers sometimes reads like a docu-novel, but the warmth of the individual characters and the simple music of the narrative will appeal to middle-graders."

Publishers Weekly was even less positive, calling this story of a nine-year-old boy and his younger sister attempting to adjust after their move from New York City to Vermont in the wake of their parents' divorce "alternately affecting and treacly."

Selected Other Books by Julia Alvarez

Novel

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents (1991)
In the Time of the Butterflies (1994)
¡Yo! (1997)
In the Name of Salomé (2000)
Saving the World (2006)

Poetry

Old Age Ain't for Sissies (editor) (1979)
The Housekeeping Book (1984)
Homecoming (1996)
The Other Side/El Otro Lado (1995)
Seven Trees (1998)
The Woman I Kept to Myself (2004)

Other

Something to Declare (essays) (1998)
The Secret Footprints (picture book) (2000)
A Cafecito Story (2001)
Before We Were Free (young adult) (2002)
A Gift of Gracias: the Legend of Atlagracia (children's picture book) (2004)
Finding Miracles (young adult novel) (2004)

Related Reading

Books

Contemporary Literary Criticism, Volume 93, Gale (Detroit, Mich.), 1996.
Dictionary of Hispanic Biography, Gale (Detroit, Mich.), 1996.
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Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2nd edition, Gale (Detroit, Mich.), 1998.
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Sirias, Silvio, Julia Alvarez: A Critical Companion, Greenwood (Westport, Conn.), 2001.

Periodicals

Americas, March, 1995, Barbara Mujica, review of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, p. 60; January, 2001, Ben Jacques, "Julia Alvarez: Real Flights of Imagination," p. 22, and Barbara Mujica, review of *In the Name of Salomé*, p. 60.

Americas Review, Ibis Gomez-Vega, review of *¡Yo!*, pp. 242-245.
Antioch Review, summer, 1991, review of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, pp. 474-475.
Atlanta Journal-Constitution, March 23, 2003, Teresa K. Weaver, "Books: Writer Alvarez's 'Rays of Light' Sometimes Irritate the Powerful," p. C1.
Belles Lettres, spring, 1995, Janet Jones Hampton, review of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, pp. 6-7.
Bilingual Review, January-April, 2001, Ricardo Castells, "The Silence of Exile in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*," pp. 34-42.
Black Issues Book Review, March 2001, Milca Esdaille, "Same Trip, Different Ships," p. 40.
Bloomsbury Review, March 1992, pp. 9-10.
Booklist, July, 1994, Brad Hooper, review of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, p. 1892; September 15, 1996, Brad Hooper, review of *¡Yo!*, p. 180; August, 1998, Donna Seaman, review of *Something to Declare*, p. 1952; March 15, 2000, Veronica Scrol, review of *In the Name of Salomé*, p. 1292; August 2000, Connie Fletcher, review of *The Secret Footprints*, p. 2143, and Isabel Schon, reviews of *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *¡Yo!*, p. 2154; February 15, 2001, Hazel Rochman, review of *How Tia Lola Came to Stay*, p. 1138; August, 2002, Hazel Rochman, review of *Before We Were Free*, p. 1945; March 1, 2004, Donna Seaman, review of *The Woman I Kept to Myself*, p. 1126.
Boston Globe, June 28, 2000, Vanessa E. Jones, "Writing Her Book of High Grace."
Callaloo, Summer 2000, William Luis, review of "A Search for Identity in Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*," p. 839.
Christian Science Monitor, October 17, 1994, Katherine A. Powers, review of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, p. 13; October 29, 1998, Kendra Nordin, review of *Something to Declare*, p. B7; July 6, 2000, Kendra Nordin, "Recalling the Dreams of a Caribbean Past."
Commonweal, April 10, 1992, review of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, pp. 23-25.
Entertainment Weekly, August 14, 1992, review of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, p. 56.
Globe and Mail (Toronto), August 31, 1991, p. C6.
Hispanic, June, 1991, David D. Medina, review of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, p. 55; December 1994, Mary Bats Estrada, review of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, p. 82; March 1997, Monica Hsu, review of *¡Yo!*, pp. 68-69.
Horn Book, September-October, 2002, Lauren Adams, review of *Before We Were Free*, pp. 563-565.

- Intertexts*, Spring 1999, Ibis Gomez-Vega, "Hating the Self in the 'Other,' or How Yolanda Learns to See Her Own Kind in Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*," pp. 85-98.
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- Latin American Literature and Arts Review*, Volume 54, 1997, Heather Rosaria-Sievert, "Conversation with Julia Alvarez," pp. 31-37.
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- Newsweek*, April 20, 1992, Susan Miller, review of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, p. 78; October 17, 1994, Susan Miller, review of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, pp. 77-78.
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- Publishers Weekly*, December 16, 1996, Jonathan Bing, "Julia Alvarez: Books That Cross Borders," p. 38; May 15, 2000, review of *In the Name of Salomé*, p. 86. April 5, 1991; July 11, 1994; April 24, 1995; March 18, 1996; October 14, 1996; December 16, 1996; July 13, 1998, review of *Something to Declare*, p. 67; September 21, 1998; May 15, 2000; August 14, 2000, review of *The Secret Footprints*, p. 354; February 26, 2001, review of *How Tía Lola Came to Stay*, p. 87.
- School Library Journal*, April 2002, Maria Otero-Boisvert, *How Tía Lola Came to Stay*, p. S63; August 2002.

General Objectives

1. To understand the effects of divorce
2. To analyze cultural dislocation
3. To appreciate the need for reliable child care
4. To analyze a colorful character
5. To explore the importance of sports for many children
6. To appreciate a close family
7. To understand the novel's title
8. To describe the novel's setting
9. To trace how the family settles into their new life
10. To see how the plot is resolved

Specific Objectives

1. To explore why Mami, Miguel, and Juanita have moved to Vermont without Papi
2. To understand why Miguel feels different from his neighbors
3. To see why Mami has invited Tia Lola to come for a visit
4. To appreciate Tia Lola's zest for life and her vibrant personality
5. To understand why Miguel wants to play baseball and win a spot on the team
6. To compare and contrast Miguel and Juanita
7. To trace how Miguel learns to embrace his heritage
8. To see how the kids realize that a divorce does not signal the end of a family, just a different configuration of one
9. To discover why Tia Lola decides to stay with the family
10. To analyze why the family goes to the Dominican Republic over Christmas

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Julia Alvarez's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

Symbol: a person, place, or object that represents an abstract idea. For example, a dove may symbolize peace or a rose may symbolize love. In *How Tia Lola Came to Stay*, vibrant colors—especially purple—symbolize happiness and *joi de vivre*. Tia Lola, the novel's vibrant life force, embraces these colors. Her clothing is brilliantly hued, like a Caribbean bird's plumage. In addition, she paints the house a vivid purple.

Theme: the main idea in a work of literature, a general statement about life. The theme can be stated outright in the work, or readers will have to infer it from details about plot, characters, and setting. Readers can infer

from details in *How Tia Lola Came to Stay* that the novel's theme concerns the importance of embracing your heritage and taking joy in your identity.

Description: a word picture of what something or someone is like. Description is made up of sensory details that help readers form pictures in their minds. *How Tia Lola Came to Stay* is rich in descriptions such as this one of the title character: "You can't miss her! Her skin is the same soft brown color as theirs. Her black hair is piled up in a bun on her head with a pink hibiscus on top. She wears bright red lipstick and above her lips she has a big black beauty mark. On her colorful summer dress, parrots fly toward palm trees, and flowers look ready to burst from the fabric if they can only figure out how." (p. 12) This description helps readers visualize Tia Lola, appreciate her flamboyant appearance, and infer her outgoing personality.

The Importance of Setting

How Tia Lola Came to Stay has three settings: a small town in Vermont, New York City, and the Dominican Republic. Vermont is the dominant setting.

Vermont, a New England state, ranks 43rd in land area and is the second smallest of the fifty states with regard to population. Famous for its scenery, dairy products and maple syrup (it is the leading producer of maple syrup in the U.S.), Vermont has also long been known for its liberal, tolerant attitude. For example, on April 25, 2000, Vermont legislators passed and Gov. Howard Dean signed into law HB847, a law providing the state-sanctioned benefits of marriage to gay and lesbian couples under the title Civil Union. Vermont's largest ancestry groups are French or French Canadian (close to one-quarter of the total population), English (approximately 18%), Irish (16%), and German (around 9%).

The fictional Guzman family in *How Tia Lola Came to Stay* finds that their neighbors are indeed easy-going and tolerant; even though no other Hispanics live in their area, the neighbors welcome the Guzmans and help them fit into the community. The neighbors embrace Tia Lola, even though her outgoing, flamboyant style is very different from their restrained, laconic approach to life.

The last chapter in the novel takes place in the Dominican Republic, Julia Alvarez's homeland. The Dominican Republic is located on the eastern two-thirds of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, bordering Haiti.

Hispaniola, the second-largest of the Greater Antilles islands, lies west of Puerto Rico and east of Cuba and Jamaica. A legacy of brutal dictatorship lasted for much of the twentieth century; the move towards representative democracy has improved vastly since the death of military dictator Rafael Trujillo in 1961. The country is a tropical maritime nation, with a wet season from May to November, and periodic cyclones between June and November. Miguel immediately notices the warm, moist air. He also notices that everyone looks like him, far more than any of his classmates in Vermont. That's because about three-quarters of all Dominicans are of mixed European and African ancestry.

As with all Hispanic countries in the Americas, the Dominican Republic derived its culture predominantly from Spain, though heavily blended with African traditions and, to a much smaller degree, with indigenous Amerindian cultural elements. The Spanish cultural heritage is most evident in the national language and predominant religion—Catholicism. African cultural elements are most prominent in musical expression. Miguel and his sister notice this vibrant culture, as it is very different from the more restrained culture of their new home in Vermont.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Alma Flor Ada, *My Name is Maria Isabel*
Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate*
Francisco Jimenez, *The Circuit*
Victor Martinez, *Parrot in the Oven: Mi vida*
Nicolasa Mohr, *El Bronx Remembered*
Gary Soto, *Baseball in April and Other Stories*
Gary Soto, *The Afterlife*
Gary Soto, *Living Up the Street*
Gary Soto, *Taking Sides*
Beatriz Vida, *A Library for Juana*
Jacqueline Woodson, *If You Come Softly*

DVDs and Videos

A Day Without a Mexican
American Me
And the Earth Did Not Swallow Him
The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez
Born in East L.A.
Bread and Roses
Break of Dawn
Cisco Kid
La Ciudad
Crash

Fools Rush In
El Norte
La Bamba
Maid in Manhattan
Mi Familia
The Perez Family
Real Women Have Curves
In the Time of the Butterflies (television movie)

Internet

Julia Alvarez's official site
www.alvarezjulia.com/
Julia Alvarez
www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Alvarez.html
Julia Alvarez
www.gale.com/free_resources/chh/bio/alvarez_j.htm
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voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/Bios/entries/alvarez_julia.html
Julia Alvarez.
www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0882796.html
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Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Julia Alvarez's *How Tia Lola Came to Stay* should include these aspects:

Themes

- baseball
- celebrations
- cooking
- divorce
- friendship
- maturing
- painting
- relocating
- snow
- visiting

Motifs

- moving to a new home in a new state
- learning to deal with your parents' divorce

- missing the non-custodial parent
- wanting to be popular
- being ashamed of someone who is different
- embracing life
- sharing stories
- maintaining your cultural heritage
- visiting your homeland
- learning English

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. Miguel and Juanita's parents are getting a divorce, and Mami has been hired to be a counselor in a small college in Vermont. (Chapter 1, p. 2)
(The family moves from their apartment in a Dominican section of New York city to rural Vermont. This cultural dislocation sets up the novel's theme: the importance of embracing and maintaining your heritage.)
2. "Hola, Tia Lola... Te quiero mucho." (Chapter 1, p. 11)
(Miguel is in the airport trying to find his aunt, whom he has never seen. He has never had any contact with her, either, so he has no relationship with her. Nonetheless, he announces into the loudspeaker the first words that pop into his head, the words that his mother says to him and his sister every night: I love you. Ironically, he comes to love Tia Lola very much.)
3. You don't have to speak the same language to have fun with other people. (Chapter 3, p. 33)
(Tia Lola doesn't speak very much English at all, just a phrase here and there. However, she makes her meaning clear and no one has any difficulty catching her infectious spirit and sense of fun. She brings people together through time-honored methods: dance, food, and a positive outlook.)
4. He looks over at his father, who smiles back at him. It's true what Papi has said. Miguel is ten years old today and already feeling ten times prouder of being who he is. (Chapter 3, p. 42)
(When his family first moves to Vermont, Miguel is upset because no one shares his dark eyes and skin. They don't speak Spanish or eat the same foods as he does, either. Tia Lola helps Miguel accept his heritage and feel pride in it. This is her most important lesson and the novel's primary theme.)
5. Everything is magic, if made with love. (Chapter 4, p. 53)
(Tia Lola styles herself as a santera, which Mami explains is "like a doctor who works with magic

instead of medicine." In fact, it is a form of Hispanic-Latino mysticism. Miguel believes that his aunt can bend reality to her will, helping him make the baseball team and even reuniting his parents. He comes to realize that she does have a special type of magic, the magic of love.)

6. It turns out Tia Lola has laid out the garden in the shape of the island! (Chapter 5, p. 67)
(Tia Lola enjoys gardening and so creates a large garden in Vermont. What Miguel doesn't realize until the garden is complete, however, is that she has created it in the shape of the Dominican Republic. She has planted symbolic vegetables at key spots, including her favorite vegetable, eggplant, where the capital city would be. This shows her sly wit as well as her enormous pride in her heritage and culture.)
7. Tia Lola is dancing the merengue with one of the shop keepers right on the sidewalk. (Chapter 6, p. 89)
(Miguel, Juanita, and Tia Lola have traveled to New York City to visit with Daniel, the children's father. Tia Lola defers to the children's wishes and so they attend a major league baseball game and visit the zoo. On the last day, however, they visit grandfather and grandmother, who live in the old neighborhood. Delighted to be among her own people and her own culture, Tia Lola breaks out into dance. Her joy is infectious, as others join in.)
8. Behind them, Tia Lola and Rudy each hold the corner of a pennant that reads: CHARLIE'S BOYS. (Chapter 7, p. 103)
(Tia Lola has cleverly disarmed cantankerous Colonel Charlebois by making him the mascot for the baseball team. Unlike the others, Tia Lola realizes that the colonel is cranky because he is widowed, lonely, and infirm. Being singled out for this honor gives him attention and recalls the glory days of his youth. This incident reveals Tia Lola's understanding of human nature and psychology.)
9. "Home is wherever you are with the people you love. And that is always the best place to be!" (Chapter 9, p. 128)
(Tia Lola very much misses the warmth and color of her homeland, but she realizes that "home" is defined more by people than by place. She teaches this vital lesson to Miguel and Juanita, which enables them to adjust to their new surroundings.)
10. "Thank you, Santa, for the great trip," he begins. "But just one thing. When it's over, I want Tia Lola to come back home with us." (Chapter 10, p. 144)
(Tia Lola has explained to Miguel that it is permissible to ask for one more small favor after you receive a gift of any sort. He has seen through her Santa cos-

tume and so for his one small favor, asks that she live with them permanently. This shows his acceptance of his heritage and culture.)

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 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. Why did Mami invite Tia Lola for a visit?
(Mami needs someone to baby-sit the kids while she is off at work. She also wants her aunt's company and consolation as she goes through the divorce. Tia Lola functions as her mother, having raised her when her birth mother died.)
2. What does Miguel do to welcome Tia Lola to America?
(He writes "Bienvenida, Tia Lola!" in the snow. This translates to "Welcome, Tia Lola." She is very touched by the gesture.)
3. How do Miguel and Juanita convince Mami to let them go to New York City with Tia Lola?
(Miguel and Juanita try to trick Mami into believing that Tia Lola has learned English so she would be a good chaperone. They do this by holding up signs on which they have written English phrases. Mami is not fooled; rather, she is touched that they want to visit their father so badly that they would try to fool her.)
4. Why didn't Tia Lola ever get married?
(Mami's mother died when Mami was three years old. Her mother had a younger sister, Tia Lola, who took over the child-rearing duties. Tia Lola was too busy being Mami's mother to find a husband. She was also too devoted to the child to abrogate her duties and responsibilities.)
5. What gift does Miguel ask Santa Claus for?
(Miguel asks that Tia Lola live with his family forever.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. Why does Miguel have mixed feelings about having Tia Lola around?
(First, he resents having a baby-sitter because he wants to be considered mature. Second, he loves his aunt for her warmth and friendliness, but is ashamed that she is different from all the other people he encounters in Vermont.)
7. What lesson do the kids learn from Tia Lola?
(They learn to accept and embrace their heritage.)

8. Why do you think Miguel's parents got divorced? The reason is never stated in the novel.
(Since Mami has moved out and is crying a great deal, it appears that Papi has done something to disappoint her on a profound level. Perhaps he has betrayed her or failed to help her achieve her own dreams and goals.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Do you think Tia Lola is a realistic character? Why or why not?
(Some students are likely to conclude that she is too good to be true: too wise, too forgiving, too cheerful. Further, it seems highly unlikely that someone transplanted from the tropics would take root and flourish so easily in the cool and stony Vermont soil.)
10. One critic called the novel "treacly," meaning that it is sentimental and overly-sweet. Agree or disagree with this statement.
(The ending is very pat and convenient and the scene with Santa Claus borders on cliché.)

Questions 11-13 (Creative Level)

11. Working with a small group of classmates, discuss what you liked the most about Tia Lola.
12. Perform a brief play in which you take the action ten years in the future. Show what has happened to the main characters: Miguel, Juanita, Mami, and Tia Lola.

Across the Curriculum

Language Arts

1. Julia Alvarez dedicates this book to someone named Susanna. Imagine that you wrote a book. Write a dedication for it.
2. Write a short story about an outrageous relative of yours. If you don't have one, make one up!
3. Create a glossary of commonly-used Spanish words. Include at least twenty-five words and their English translations.
4. The youngsters' attempt to teach Tia Lola English leads to many humorous situations as she interprets idioms literally and uses expressions inappropriately. List five idioms that newcomers to America are likely to misunderstand. Include their meanings, too.
5. Tia Lola tells a special birthday story for Mami. Tell a special story for someone you love.

Drama

1. Working with your classmates, debate whether or not it's better for divorced parents to share custody of their children or to have one parent be the primary caretaker. Include the advantages and disadvantages of each custody arrangement.
2. In a speech, explain what life lessons Juanita and Miguel learn from their aunt.
3. Improvise a scene in which you and a group of classmates act out a day from Tia Lola's life in the Dominican Republic when she was your age.
4. Create some skits to show ways that people make new friends when they move to a new place, as Juanita and Miguel do.
5. Choose one chapter in the novel and present it as a Reader's Theatre.

Art/Music

1. Build a model of the Guzmans' Vermont home.
2. Design a poster for a movie version of *How Tia Lola Came to Stay*.
3. Write a song about the events in this novel. Your song can be any form you wish, such as a ballad or rap song.
4. Draw Daniel's new picture, "Three Days in Nueva York."
5. Tia Lola brings a piñata to Miguel and Juanita. Make a piñata of your own and use it as the basis for a party.
6. Everyone sings "Happy Birthday" in Spanish to Miguel. Learn how to sing "Happy Birthday" in another language.

Geography and History

1. Report on the Dominican Republic. Include information about the country's history, geography, climate, population, and principle exports, for instance.
2. Miguel comments that the Vermont house looks so bad that "even Dracula wouldn't live here." Who was the real Dracula? Research this topic and share your findings in a report.
3. Tia Lola practices a religion called Santeria. Explain the beliefs of this religion.
4. Tia Lola ends up at the Empire State Building. Make a poster or other display showing six of the most important man-made landmarks in America.
5. The novel lists some famous Dominican baseball players, including Sammy Sosa and the Alou brothers. Choose one famous Major League baseball player from the Dominican Republic and report on him.
6. Draw the flag of the Dominican Republic. How is it

similar and different from the flag of the United States?

7. Alvarez and her husband started a sustainable farm-literacy center called Alta Gracia. Prepare a bulletin board display about this program.

Science/Math

1. In the Dominican Republic, the kids are treated to many different kinds of mangoes. Display some different produce from Latin American and South American countries. Invite everyone in class to taste some of the fruits and vegetables.
2. Plant a garden, as Tia Lola does. Make it a fanciful shape.
3. Tia Lola doesn't understand the phrase "green thumb" and thinks that it means someone has gangrene. Explain the causes and cures of gangrene.
4. On a map of the United States, show where Vermont and New York City are located. Then calculate the distance between them.
5. Find the percentage of first marriages that end in divorce. Have the numbers gone up or down in the past decade?

Alternate Assessment

1. Demonstrate how to dance the merengue, as Tia Lo does.
2. Miguel spells out "Welcome, Tia Lola" in Spanish in the new snow. Figure out a way to make someone feel welcome in your home or town.
3. Write a critical review of the novel for publication in the school newspaper.
4. Make a timeline showing the main events in the novel.

Vocabulary Test

Write a word from the list below in the blank next to the correct definition.

din	radiant	lurk	nutritious	quaint
demented	glorious	wistful	panic	tunic

1. _____ providing healthful nourishment
2. _____ bright with light, hope, joy
3. _____ having an old-fashioned or odd attractiveness or charm
4. _____ a gown-like outer garment, sometimes worn belted
5. _____ to slink, lie in wait, or hang around secretly
6. _____ loud, confused noise; clamor
7. _____ a sudden overwhelming fear that causes irrational behavior
8. _____ with melancholy longing or yearning
9. _____ crazy, insane
10. _____ delightful; wonderful; completely enjoyable

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided.

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------|
| A. Reggie | F. Tom and Becky |
| B. Colonel Charlesbois | G. Sam and Dean |
| C. Stargazer | H. Daniel |
| D. Tia Lola | I. Miguel |
| E. Mott | J. Juanita |

- ___ 1. boy in Miguel's class who is mocked for his home haircut and used clothing
- ___ 2. Papi
- ___ 3. Guzmans' neighbors; they are farmers
- ___ 4. UPS delivery man
- ___ 5. Miguel's outgoing and flamboyant aunt
- ___ 6. Guzmans' landlord
- ___ 7. Miguel's baseball teammates
- ___ 8. ten-year-old who suspects that his aunt can work magic
- ___ 9. Mami's new friend in Vermont; she runs a New Age shop
- ___ 10. Miguel's seven-year-old sister

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either **T** for true or **F** if any part is false.

- ___ 1. In New York, Mami worked as a window decorator and painter.
- ___ 2. Tia Lola comes from the Dominican Republic.
- ___ 3. Miguel is upset that in the three years that the family has been in Vermont, he has not made a single friend.
- ___ 4. The family can't find Tia Lola at the airport, so they page her, saying "I love you very much" in English.
- ___ 5. They finally find their aunt and are amazed at her brilliantly-hued flower-print dress and migrating beauty mark over her lipsticked mouth.
- ___ 6. Tia Lola practices the Santeria religion.
- ___ 7. The boys think that Miguel's house is haunted and are baffled by the exotic Tia Lola.
- ___ 8. Papi is the coach for the Little League team.
- ___ 9. In New York City, the family attends a baseball game and the zoo.
- ___ 10. The Colonel refuses to give the kids permission to practice baseball in the back pasture.

Part III: Quote Identification (30 points)

Briefly explain why each quote is important in the novel.

- 1. It is the last day of January. Four weeks ago, during Christmas break, they moved from New York City into a farmhouse Mami rented from a Realtor by phone.

2. "Hola, Tia Lola. ...Te quiero mucho."

3. Everything is magic, if made with love.

How Tia Lola Came to Visit Stay Julia Alvarez

4. Tia Lola is dancing the merengue with one of the shopkeepers right on the sidewalk.

5. "Home is wherever you are with the people you love. And that is always the best place to be!"

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. What lesson about life does *How Tia Lola Came to Stay* teach?

2. Provide two details from the novel that make *How Tia Lola Came to Stay* seem to be nonfiction, even though it is really fiction.

3. Compare and contrast Miguel to the other boys in his town.

4. What function does Rudy serve in the novel?

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Choose the word or phrase that best completes each of the following statements.

1. In Vermont, Mami has taken a position as a (**decorator, college counselor**).
2. Tia Lola comes from (**Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic**)
3. The family can't find Tia Lola at the airport, so they page her, saying ("**I love you very much**," "**Calling Tia Lola**") in Spanish.
4. They finally find their aunt and are amazed at her brilliantly-hued flower-print dress and (**scar, beauty mark**) over her lipsticked mouth.
5. Tia Lola practices the (**Protestant, Santeria**) religion.
6. Miguel's new friends think Miguel's house is (**haunted, shabby**) and are baffled by the exotic Tia Lola.
7. In New York City, the family attends a Major League baseball game and visits the (**Empire State Building, zoo**).
8. Tia Lola names Papi's latest painting ("**Happy Days are Here Again**," "**Three Happy Days in Nueva York**").
9. The kids are shocked to discover that Tia Lola is painting the house (**turquoise, purple**).
10. Tia Lola names the baseball team (**Charlie's Boys, The Spartans**).

Part II: Matching (30 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided.

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| ___ 1. Miguel's teacher | A. Linda |
| ___ 2. Juanita's brother | B. Daniel |
| ___ 3. Restaurant owner | C. Miguel |
| ___ 4. Mami | D. Juanita |
| ___ 5. seven-year-old girl who moves to Vermont | E. Tia Lola |
| ___ 6. Papi | F. Rudy |
| ___ 7. Guzmans' neighbors | G. Tom and Becky |
| ___ 8. Guzmans' landlord | H. Sam and Dean |
| ___ 9. Miguel's classmates | I. Colonel Charlesbois |
| ___ 10. Mami's surrogate mother | J. Mrs. Prouty |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Explain why each is important in the novel.

1. Tia Lola's birthmark

2. "Three Happy Days in Nueva York"

3. purple

4. scarf

5. Santa Claus

How Tia Lola Came to Visit Stay Julia Alvarez

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. What makes Tia Lola such an admirable character? Isolate and analyze at least two of her best traits.
2. Trace the novel's plot. Include the rising action, climax, and resolution.
3. Explain how the novel shows this theme: the importance of embracing your heritage and culture.
4. What role does the setting play in the novel?

Answer Key

VOCABULARY TEST

1. nutritious
2. radiant
3. quaint
4. tunic
5. lurk
6. din
7. panic
8. wistful
9. demented
10. glorious

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. E | 6. B |
| 2. H | 7. G |
| 3. F | 8. I |
| 4. A | 9. C |
| 5. D | 10. J |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

Part III: Quote Identification (30 points)

1. The family moves from their apartment in a Dominican section of New York City to rural Vermont. This cultural dislocation sets up the novel's theme: the importance of embracing and maintaining your heritage. The opening also brings the novel full circle, from its beginning at Christmas to its conclusion at Christmas.
2. Miguel is in the airport trying to find his aunt, whom he has never seen. He has never had any contact with her, either, so he has no relationship with her. Nonetheless, he announces into the loudspeaker the first words that pop into his head, the words that his mother says to him and his sister every night: "I love you." Ironically, he comes to love Tia Lola very much.
3. Tia Lola styles herself as a *santera*, which Mami explains is "like a doctor who works with magic instead of medicine." In fact, it is a form of Hispanic-Latino mysticism. Miguel believes that his aunt can bend reality to her will, helping him make the baseball team and even reuniting his parents. He comes to realize that she does have a special type of magic, the magic of love.
4. Miguel, Juanita, and Tia Lola have traveled to New York City to visit with Daniel, the children's father. She defers to the children's wishes and so they attend a major league baseball game and visit the zoo. On the last day, however, they visit grandfather and grandmother, who live in the old neighborhood. Delighted to be among her own people and her own culture, Tia Lola breaks out into dance. Her joy is infectious, as others join in.
5. Tia Lola very much misses the warmth and color of her homeland, but she realizes that "home" is defined more by people than by place. She teaches this vital lesson to Miguel and Juanita, which enables them to adjust to their new surroundings.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. college counselor | 6. haunted |
| 2. the Dominican Republic | 7. zoo |
| 3. "I love you very much" | 8. "Three Happy Days in Nueva York." |
| 4. beauty mark | 9. purple |
| 5. Santeria | 10. Charlie's Boys |

Part II: Matching (30 points)

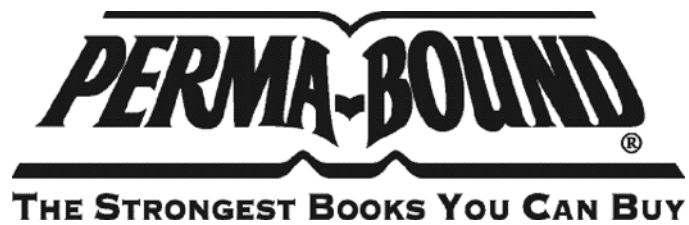
- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. J | 6. B |
| 2. C | 7. G |
| 3. F | 8. I |
| 4. A | 9. H |
| 5. D | 10. E |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

1. Tia Lola has a fake birthmark that she sticks above her lip on alternating sides of her face. It often comes loose, too. This shows her flamboyant, outgoing, and fun personality. It also shows that she doesn't take herself too seriously.
2. "Three Happy Days in Nueva York" is the name that Tia Lola gives to Papi's new picture. It represents the happy time the family has visiting with him. The title's combination of English and Spanish words also shows the blending of the two cultures.
3. Purple is traditionally the color of royalty, and in this novel, it comes to stand for Tia Lola, especially her lively personality. She paints the house purple, showing that she is bringing rich, vibrant color into their lives.
4. Tia Lola has a long scarf that she wears virtually all the time. It comes to stand for her.
5. Tia Lola wears the Santa Claus suit at the end of the novel, when the family is in the Dominican Republic. This is only appropriate because like Santa, Tia Lola brings joy and happiness into the lives of everyone she meets.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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