



How the García Girls Lost Their Accents

by Julia Alvarez

Teacher's Guide

Written By Alberto Ruben Filipponi

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Synopsis

SECTION I 1989-1972

Chapter 1 Antojos (Yolanda)

Yolanda, one of five daughters, and her family have just returned from the United States to the Dominican Republic, and the girl is clearly happy to be home. Never feeling quite at home in the United States, she embraces the quiet countryside of her native land. Her family is clearly well to do, but Yolanda does not seem to really fit in. She drives off to the countryside from a party, and she drives in search of guavas. It is the native fruit of the Dominican Republic which reveals to Yolanda that she may have lost more than she thought of her native land in the five years of exile in the States. A woman corrects her on the pronunciation of guavas to the familiar local Spanish *guayabas*. She drives off with a little boy who knows where there is a large field of ripe guavas after tempting him into helping her by offering him American dollars. The car suffers a flat tire on the country road, and she is helped by strangers who know her family. Yolanda seems no longer sure of her surroundings or her identity.

Chapter 2 The Kiss (Sophía)

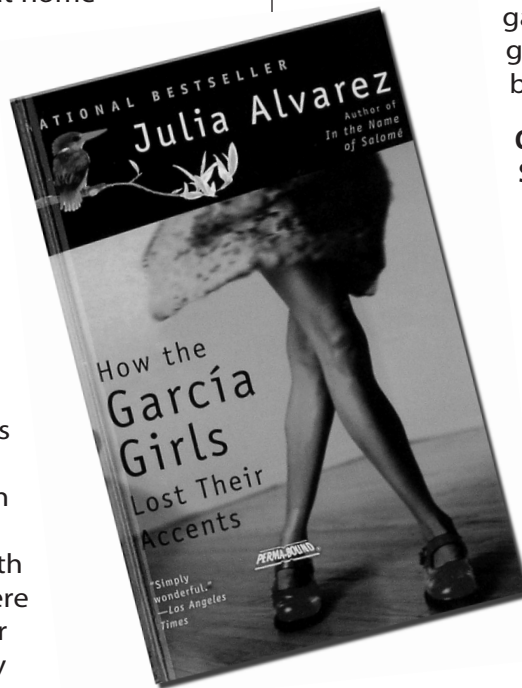
Sofia is the youngest of the four sisters. Unlike her other accomplished sisters, Sofia has always been a free spirit who downplays her several mistakes in life and seems to have found happiness. She has met a German scientist in Colombia and runs off to marry him after her father found and read his love letters among her belongings. In his anger, her father had called her a whore. Winning the affection of everyone in a room seems to come easily

for Sofia, but she only wants the affection of her father. Carlos, her father, has reconciled with Otto, her husband and scientist, especially when their union begets a grandson who is named Carlos after him. Sofia, however, remains outside the old man's good graces. He makes a small concession by allowing Sofia to throw a party for him at her home. She plans relentlessly to make a wonderful party for her father. With everyone having too much to drink, Sofia embarrasses herself and her father by pushing an innocent game too far; the party becomes a great disappointment, and the rift between them widens.

Chapter 3 The Four Girls (Carla, Yolanda, Sandra, Sofia)

On different occasions, Mami relates stories of her daughters offering greater insight into the relationships the four sisters have with each-other, themselves, and their parents. First the mother rants about Carla, the oldest, and her obsession with red sneakers as a child. She describes Yolanda's love of poetry at a recital to the married man Yolanda is secretly seeing. On the birth of her granddaughter Mami talks to a man outside of the nursery recounting the

story of Sofia and her husband and their romantic meeting in Peru (of course, they really met in Colombia). She describes Sandra's mental breakdown to Sandra's doctor at a mental institution while Mami's disinterested husband stares out the window. Later, the girls all unite to celebrate the birth of Sofia's daughter; they argue but try to get along while discussing their lives and feelings. The girls each have a deep conflict with their parents, each other and their lives. Yolanda is recently divorced, Sandra is on medication for her mental illness, Sofia is lamenting about her feud with her father, and Carla, the child psychologist, seems to be trying to put pieces together and analyze everyone in the room, much to the chagrin of the other sisters.



Chapter 4 Joe (Yolanda)

Yolanda's marriage to John fails. The couple seems to always be feuding because of their different ways at looking at life; at each other. Finally, being unable to take it any more, Yolanda is divorced seeking the consolation of her parents and a doctor with whom she may be falling in love. Yolanda is torn between her love of words and the way some of them make her feel, especially the most important one she cannot understand—love.

Chapter 5 The Rudy Elmenhurst Story (Yolanda)

The narrative shifts from third to first person as Yolanda reveals her life in her own words and from her own perspective. A bad boy, Rudy Elmenhurst, attempts to conquer Yolanda. Trying to get the innocent Yolanda to give herself to him, Rudy courts her the way he thinks she wants to be courted. The initial attraction to his liberated ways, over time, offends Yolanda, and then his real and sole intention is revealed finally and they break up. At a party Yolanda sees Rudy with another woman and she realizes that any possibility of reconciling their relationship is over. Yolanda struggles with her heritage, her religious views, and her inability to quickly catch on to the slang of the time. As confused and scared Yolanda is, through it all is an overriding sense of self-assurance that does not betray her, even years later when Rudy abruptly tries to make love to her one more time.

SECTION II 1970-1960

Chapter 1 A Regular Revolution (Carla, Sandi, Yoyo, Fifi)

The political revolution that the Dominican Republic endured parallels the social revolution the "American" cousins bring to the island with them. Fifi opts to stay on the island when her parents give her an ultimatum. Upon their return six months later, Fifi has become everything the other sisters had hoped to never see. With her hair done right and her new island beau, the girls are scared that if Sofia conforms to the idea of a proper girl, then they will soon have to as well. Sofia's new life turns upside down again when her sisters arrive with books and ideas they bring from the U.S. Fifi has stopped reading and abandoned her rebellious behavior due to a stereotypically overbearing boyfriend. The other three sisters are eager to get Fifi back and begin to challenge the social customs of the island. They plot to prevent Fifi from getting pregnant by an ignorant, macho boyfriend which would seal her fate, and perhaps, that of the other

sisters as well. Fifi is reprimanded for being with her boyfriend unchaperoned and is made to return to the States. Although she is sad and angry at her sisters, the other sisters are confident it was the best thing that could have happened to this free spirit who was on the verge of getting grounded into an average existence.

Chapter 2 Daughter of Invention (Mami, Papi, Yoyo)

The family struggles with the new found freedoms that America has to offer them. Papi has started a successful business, Mami spends most of her time trying to invent new things, and Yolanda is coming to terms with her success in school and the newness of life in America. Yolanda writes a speech to give to her school and takes her inspiration from the poet Walt Whitman. For Papi, the speech proves to be too "free" and inappropriate for his daughter to give; he rips it up in a fit of rage. Staying up all night, Mami helps Yolanda with a new speech and encourages her despite her father's temper. Yolanda can not understand why her father, who risked so much to make his country free, would not allow his daughters to enjoy the freedom their new land has given them. Eventually, Papi pleads for forgiveness and buys Yolanda a new typewriter.

Chapter 3 Trespass (Carla)

Carla, the oldest sister, is returning from school one day and is approached by a pervert in a green car. She runs home unharmed, and her mother calls the police. Carla is further terrified because she has inherited her father's distrust for people in uniform. What seems to be a typical interview by decent and respectful policemen is a grueling torture for a young girl who is adjusting not only to the changes in her new environment, but to changes in her body as well. As exposed as the man in the car, the American reality for some immigrants is one of bitter racism and distrust.

Chapter 4 Snow (Yolanda)

Yolanda is in fourth grade in New York and is being taught by a nice, patient nun named Sister Zoe. In class she is learning many new things while in the outside world, Cuba is arming Russian nuclear weapons and aiming them at the United States (the Cuban Missile Crisis). Terrified when she sees snow for the first time, Yolanda confuses it with radioactive fallout from a nuclear bomb.

Chapter 5 Floor Show (Sandi)

Sandi, forced by circumstance to mature more quickly than she had wanted, is very observant of this new world around her. She dislikes the landlord and gives the impression that she does not care for Americans much either. The family is invited by Carlos' sponsors, Dr. Fanning and his wife, to dinner at an exclusive Spanish restaurant. The Fannings had visited the García family in the Dominican Republic where the Garcías occupied a place of stature. In America, however, the family has fallen from their lofty place in society and is not on welfare thanks to the assistance of Laura's father who wires them money for the rent and the girls' education. At the restaurant Mrs. Fanning quickly becomes intoxicated, and Sandi sees her makes a pass at Carlos by the restroom. She is unimpressed with the food but loves the Spanish dancing. Sandi's impression from her experience at the restaurant is that being Spanish is something beautiful that people pay to be around. The dancers are interrupted by a drunken Mrs. Fanning who, to the chagrin of her husband, takes center stage. Sandra is appalled because Mrs. Fanning has interrupted the Spanish dancers with a rude, drunken, American mockery of her culture. After dinner, the Fannings buy dolls for each of the girls while Carlos endures the indignity of being at the mercy of people who enable his family to remain in America.

SECTION III 1960-1956

Chapter 1 The Blood of the Conquistadores (Mami, Papi, the Four Girls)

The four girls, Papi, and Mami are forced to leave the island because of a plot by Carlos (Papi) to overthrow Trujillo, the Dominican dictator. Papi hides in a special room when the secret police (SIM) show up to "ask a few questions." The family heads off to the United States with their Tio Vic who is not their uncle, but an American CIA operative who has helped with the plot. Chucha, the Haitian maid who has helped raise Laura and her daughters, closes down the abandoned family household and laments the loss of the girls and the future struggles that await them in America.

Chapter 2 The Human Body (Yoyo)

Yolanda relates the story of her Aunt Mimi and her grandparents, Mamita and Papito. The grandparents worked for the Trujillo regime as UN ambassa-

dors to the United States. The grandparents spend most of their time in New York on bogus errands to keep the educated Papito out of the domestic, Dominican political picture. Tía Mimi always brings toys, then later educational items back from the U.S. The girls prefer the toys over the educational items. Mundin, Yolanda's best-friend cousin, bribes her with a piece of clay to show him that she is a girl. To expose themselves without getting caught, the three (Yolanda, Fifi, and Mundin) go to a shed in the forbidden part of the compound but are caught. They lie their way out of getting in trouble by saying that the SIM guards were at the house as was customary when the grandparents would return from the United States. This one time, the girls take advantage of the paranoid and unrelenting searches the corrupt regime puts their family through.

Chapter 3 Still Lives (Sandi)

Sandi describes life with her extended family and her brief attempt at art lessons. Art was important to her because it was what made her stand out in the family and gave her a unique sense of being. Unfortunately, she does not get along with her instructor and a misadventure ensues leaving her with a broken arm.

Chapter 4 An American Surprise (Carla)

Carla recalls her days as a little girl and with her favorite house maid Gladys who was different from other servants. Carla and the maid dream of going to New York, a land of snow in the winter. Carla recounts a memory of Christmas at home with all of the servants and family and how her gift to Gladys led to the maid's dismissal. Her gift, a coin-operated bank which featured the Virgin Mary which would ascend into the clouds when a coin was inserted, is returned but breaks as the maid is driven off leaving the figure, the maid, and Carla each caught somewhere between two worlds.

CHAPTER 5 THE DRUM (YOYO)

Yolanda narrates a story in which, as a little girl, she was given a drum from New York. Her drum indirectly leads to the death of a kitten which she intended to take as a pet. Yolanda explains that the incident affected her for the rest of her life and how she continues to be haunted with devils and secrets.

Timeline of the Dominican Republic

1492	Christopher Columbus visits the island, which he names Hispaniola, or "Little Spain".		
1496	Spaniards set up first Spanish colony in Western hemisphere at Santo Domingo (the Dominican Republic).		
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 Jean-Pierre Boyer marches troops into Santo Domingo and annexes it.		
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, and annuls its annexation of, the Dominican Republic following a popular revolt.		
1865	The second Dominican Republic proclaimed.		
1906	Dominican Republic and U.S. sign 50-year treaty with the U.S. taking 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 personal dictatorship following the overthrow of President Horacio Vazquez.		
1937	Army massacres 19,000-20,000 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.		
1961	Trujillo assassinated.		
1962	Juan Bosch, founder of the leftist Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) elected president in the first democratic elections for nearly four decades.	1963	Bosch deposed in military coup and replaced by a three-man civilian junta.
		1965	Some 30,000 U.S. troops invade the Dominican Republic following a pro-Bosch uprising.
		1966	Joaquin Balaguer, a Trujillo protégé and former leader of the Reformist Party (later to become the centre-right Christian Social Reform Party (PRSC)), elected president.
		1978	Silvestre Antonio Guzman (PRD) elected president and releases some 200 political prisoners, eases media censorship and purges the armed forces of Balaguer supporters.
		1979	Two hurricanes leave more than 200,000 people homeless.
		1982	PRD candidate, Jorge Blanco, elected president.
		1985	International Monetary Fund prescribed austerity measures, including price rises for basic foods and fuel, lead to widespread riots.
		1986	Balaguer (PRSC) re-elected president.
		1988	Jorge Blanco tried in absentia and found guilty of corruption during his presidential tenure.
		1990	Balaguer re-elected, defeating Bosch by a small majority.
		1994	Balaguer re-elected, but agrees to serve only a two-year term after being accused of fraud.
		1996	Leonel Fernandez Reyna of the leftist Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) elected president.
		1998	Hurricane George causes widespread devastation.
		2000	PRD returned to power with Hipolito Mejia as president.
		May 2001	Appeals court quashes a conviction against former president, Salvador Jorge Blanco, on charges of corruption.
		Nov. 2001	U.S. jet bound for Santo Domingo crashes in New York killing all 255 people on board.
		July 2002	Former president Joaquin Balaguer dies at age 95.
		Nov. 2003	Deadly clashes between police and protesters during demonstrations against

- high prices and power cuts. Two months later, demonstrations over economic policies leave at least five dead.
- May 2004** Former head of state Leonel Fernandez defeats incumbent president, Hipolito Mejia; Floods leave more than 2,000 dead or missing.
- March 2005** Over 130 inmates die in a prison fire.
- Sept. 2005** Congress approves a proposed free-trade agreement with the U.S. and Central American nations.

Author Sketch

Born in New York on March 27, 1950, at the age of three months, Julia Alvarez was forced to leave New York for the Dominican Republic after her father had had enough of the strife in the USA preferring instead to live under a Dominican Dictator, Rafael Trujillo. Soon the family was involved in turmoil again as her father became involved in an underground movement to overthrow Trujillo. Forced to return to the U.S., Alvarez adapted to a new life full of adventure, reflection, and triumph. Struggling to find herself, Alvarez found her passion in writing, yet for twenty some years the fruits of her labor never materialized. However in 1991, she published her first and largely successful novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*. That same year, Julia Alvarez also achieved tenure at Middlebury College, the school where she earned her undergraduate degree with a perfect 4.0 GPA. She has taught in Kentucky and Delaware and is currently involved in a writing project with her husband in the Dominican Republic to encourage young writers.



When asked why she writes, Alvarez is very frank in admitting that she writes to understand herself and the world around her. Her experience is unique—a woman who is American but speaks for multitudes in the midst of trying to bridge the gap between two different cultures, Latin American and American. Her novel *In the Time of Butterflies* became a major motion picture.

Critic's Corner

Julia Alvarez has a wonderful personality, in her own words, "flies by the seat of her pants." Her work is heavily influenced by the women in her life. Her sisters in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* along with their strong and inquisitive mother provide an opportunity to learn from strong and diverse women. *In the Time of Butterflies* recaptures the work of another set of sisters who valiantly gave their lives to start a coup to overthrow the violent dictator Trujillo. With strong female characters, Alvarez is at the forefront of the contemporary feminist literature. Her work has been called "enchanting" and delightful by *People* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines. Much of her work, including novels and poetry, has been translated into Spanish in the tradition of Esmeralda Santiago and other feminist Latina writers who feel a strong need to help spread pride and promise to the women of Latin America, the United States, and the world.

Other Works by the Author

- Saving the World*, 2006
A Gift of Gracias: The Legend of Altagracia, 2005
Finding Miracles, 2004
The Woman I Kept to Myself, 2004
Before We Were Free, 2002
A Cafecito Story, 2001
How Tía Lola Came To Visit (Stay), 2001
The Secret Footprints, 2000
In the Name of Salomé, 2000
Seven Trees, 1998
Something to Declare, 1998
Yo!, 1997
Homecoming: New and Collected Poems, 1997
The Other Side/El Otro Lado, 1995
In the Time of the Butterflies, 1994

Media Versions of Alvarez's Work

Audio (CD)

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, Recorded Books, 2006

Digital Download

"Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*: A Study Guide" from Gale's *Novels for Students*, (Vol. 5), 2002

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Lao Montez, Agustin, and Arlene Davila, ed. *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*. Columbia University Press, 2001.

Lyons, Bonnie, and Bill Oliver. "A Clean Windshield: An Interview with Julia Alvarez." In *Passion and Craft: Conversations with Notable Writers*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998.

Mujcinovic, Fatima. Postmodern Cross-culturalism and Politicization in U.S. Latina Literature: From Ana Castillo to Julia Alvarez. *Modern American Literature* 42. New York: P. Lang, 2004.

Orzoco Lang, Isaias. *Glimpses of La Yaguaita*. El Leon, 2003.

Postlewate, Marisa Herrera. How and Why I Write: Redefining Hispanic Women's Writing and Experience. *Currents in Comparative Romance Language and Literature* 131. New York: P. Lang, 2003.

Sirias, Silvio. *Julia Alvarez: A Critical Companion*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001.

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<http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst/olv5n1.html>

www.alvarezjulia.com

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julia_%C3%81lvarez

General Objectives

1. To understand the impact living in two different cultures
2. To account for the success of immigrant families like the Garcías in the United States.
3. To interpret influences in people's lives and how the same factors account for different outcomes in the lives of people
4. To understand the effects of a dictatorship on people and a country
5. To discuss the themes of change and culture
6. To explain the role of men and women in a traditional society
7. To analyze the concept of love
8. To analyze the relationships and roles of men, women, and culture in different societies

9. To describe the influence different political systems have on people
10. To evaluate the tendencies and interactions among siblings

Specific Objectives

1. To explain why Laura (Mami) has her own version of past events
2. To analyze how Yolanda reacts to love
3. To explain why Sandra had unique problems throughout her life
4. To explain Carla's choice of professions and how it seems natural considering past event in her life
5. To discuss differences in Mami and Papi and how they react to certain circumstances in the U.S. and the Dominican Republic
6. To compare and contrast the four sisters
7. To evaluate Papi's feelings towards having four girls and how he responds to them individually
8. To discuss racist attitudes in our society compared to others
9. To explain why Papi was so opposed to the Trujillo regime and assess the risks he took to fight against it
10. To analyze the girl's attitudes towards the opposite sex and how each have dealt with men in their lives

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* present the following terms and applications to the novel.

Sociological Novel: a problem novel that studies the characteristics of the society in which the characters reside. In Alvarez's book, the characters reside in two very distinct societies presenting the differing problems and characteristics of the American and the Dominican societies; examples include racism in the United States and socio-economic class discrimination in the Dominican Republic and much of Latin America. Other issues examined in Alvarez's work include proper child rearing in the two cultures, gender-role expectations, relationships among siblings, as well as marriage and intimate relationships.

Feminist Criticism: a movement that examines women in literature, especially the literature created after World War II, to study the roles placed on women. Alvarez uses feminist theory in her book as it is set in the appropriate time for a significant exploration of the feminist critique. We see how time affects the main characters (the sisters and mother) as they mature and the results of societal and political forces on the women, each developing with unique perspectives.

Dilemma: a problem or sacrifice a character in literature must endure or contend with. Alvarez's book presents numerous dilemmas of varying degrees of significance: failed relationships, misunderstandings with family, drug and mental health issues, Papi's involvement in a plot to overthrow the Dominican dictator Trujillo and the risks and dangers this poses on his family, etc.

The Importance of Setting

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents is a unique piece in that it works in reverse chronological order. We are introduced to the García family as the girls are grown and the parents already older. We come to know each of the girls, their struggles, triumphs, concerns, and are left to speculate what their futures will be. Then, going back in time, the girls get younger and younger and focus shifts to the family's past leaving the reader to analyze how those events affected the girls and brought them their adult circumstances.

As with many people or narratives, the environment or setting has a pro-

found influence on the story. We meet a grown Yolanda, visiting the Dominican Republic after a long period in the United States, refamiliarize herself with her Dominican past while feeling strangely drawn to her more recent American experience. Likewise, an adult family celebrates their patriarch's birthday in the United States while the old man, forced from his home, becomes resigned to the fact that he will never be what he has been. The setting changes from tropical paradise to urban jungle to an island under siege.

Cross-Curricular Sources

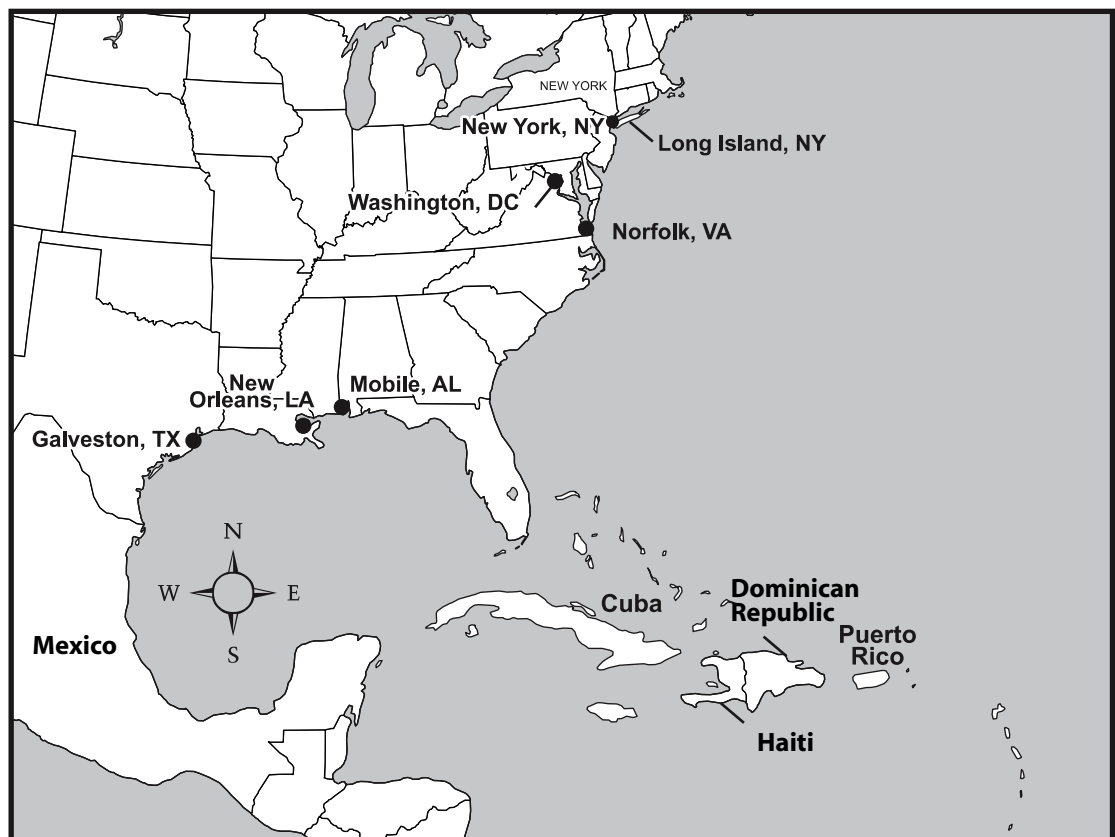
For more information about Latin America, the Dominican Republic, New York barrios, feminist criticism, family structures, and other issues deriving from this novel, consult these sources:

Articles

Latino Leaders: The National Magazine of the Successful American Latino (December, 2002)

Dominicans in Polk, New York

<http://www.mujeeresdeempresa.com/viajeras/051003-NYC-recorrida-por-barrios.shtml>



Books

Caribbean Connections, Overview of Regional History. Washington, D.C.: NECA, n.d. (1-202-429-0137)

Frank Monoya Pons, *The Dominican Republic: A National History.*

Michelle Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians and the Struggle for Hispanola.*

Eric Roorda, *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945.*

Alan Cambeira, *Quisqueya La Bella: The Dominican Republic in Historical and Cultural Perspective.*

Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Feast of the Goat*

Richard Lee Turits, *Foundations of Despotism: The Trujillo Regime and Modernity in Dominican History.*

Maribel, Ortiz Marquez, "From Third World Politics to First World Practices: Contemporary Latina Writers in the United States." In *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film.*

Internet

The World Factbook

<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

Feminist Literary Criticism and Theory

<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/lit.html>

Vandergrift's Feminist Readings

<http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/Feminist/femread.html>

Feminist Film Criticism

<http://www.questia.com/library/communication/media-studies/film/feminist-film-criticism.jsp>

Latin American families: convergences and divergences in models and policies

<http://www.eclac.cl/cgi-bin/getProd.asp?xml=/revista/noticias/articuloC/EPAL/1/20041/P20041.xml&xsl=/revista/tpl-i/p39f.xsl&base=/revista/tpl/top-bottom.xsl>

<http://countrystudies.us/dominican-republic/>

New York Neighborhoods (in Spanish)

<http://www.muieresdeempresa.com/viajeras/051003-NYC-recorrida-por-barrios.shtml>

Maps

<http://www.caribbean-on-line.com/maps/>

Films

In the Time of Butterflies (2001)

Themes and Motifs

A study of central issues and situations in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* should include the following aspects:

Themes

- love
- family
- oppression
- reflection
- memory
- adventure
- education

Motifs

- understanding the relationship between children and their parents
- risk and sacrifice
- relationships between extended family members
- the importance of education
- trying something new

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel; explain each in context. Chapters and page numbers are provided to help you find the passage easily.

1. She has always called them the four girls for as long as they can remember, and the oldest remembers all the way back to the day the fourth girl was born. (The Four Girls, p. 40)
(All of the girls are usually described in the context as "the four girls." This matters to the girls because they strive to find their individuality. It matters to the father because he often laments having four girls and no sons, which was unusual for a Dominican man of his stature. The mother calls them "the four girls" as she often confuses details of stories of each of the girls.)
2. "What is the meaning of this?" The father shook the letters in her face. (The Kiss, p.29)
(Sofia is the most daring of the four girls. She is the only one that does not pursue education or her own career but is admired by her sisters for her beauty, happiness, and her ability to work a room and attract men. The letters her father finds are from a German man Sofia had met in Colombia. The father invades her privacy and insults her, and consequently, she leaves for

Germany in the hope of marrying him. Hated at first, the German produces a grandson for the father and becomes Papi's favorite son-in-law.)

3. The restaurant came alive with the American lady's clowning. (Floor Show, p. 186)
(Dr. and Mrs. Fanning meet the Garcías at a fancy restaurant that features Spanish dancing. Mrs. Fanning is obviously intoxicated, much to the chagrin of her husband. Earlier she had tried to kiss Carlos who had taken Sandra to the bathroom. Sandra does not like her because she saw the attempted kiss and she takes attention away from the graceful dancers that Sandra wanted to identify with.)
4. Grasses and real trees and real bushes still grew beyond the barbed-wire fence posted with a big sign: PRIVATE, NO TRESPASSING. (Trespass, p. 151)
(The only time Carla has heard 'trespasses' was in the Lord's Prayer. On her way home from school Carla is insulted and nearly molested by an American pervert. She runs home more psychologically hurt that physically and tells Mami what happened. The police come shortly thereafter and make everyone feel uncomfortable because the uniforms remind the family of Trujillo's secret police who had tormented them in the Dominican Republic. This episode has a profound effect on Carla's life.)
5. The revolution is on. We have one week left to win the fight for our Fifi's heart and mind. (A Regular Revolution, p. 122)
(Rather than returning to the states Fifi stays on the island to become a "proper" señorita. While there, she falls in love with a man, Manuel, who is technically a cousin. He is a traditional man who has no understanding of the progressive attitudes and customs of American women. As he tries to get Fifi to become more traditional, the other sisters are convinced he will accomplish this by having unprotected sex and getting her pregnant. A wild race ensues to stop Fifi on a night they plan to be alone.)
6. "Stop violeting me! I hate it when you do that." (Joe, p. 74)
(Yolanda is in a frantic argument with John when she realizes that she has nothing in common with him and is tired of the American nicknames he gives her. She does not identify with the nicknames and has already had self-identity issues. Yolanda struggles in other relationships and has her own concept of love.)
7. Each flake was different, Sister Zoe had said, like a person, irreplaceable and beautiful. (Snow, p. 166)
(As a young girl observing her first snow, Yolanda reflects on her

life to that point and begins to understand that it may not be so bad to be different and unique.)

8. "She told us that she was being turned out of the human race. She was becoming a mon-key." (The Four Girls, p. 54)
(Sandra had experimented with drugs and had a life that often-times lacked happiness. At one point, Sandra has a breakdown that her mother mistakes for a clinical disease. This is the one story that Mami chooses to tell when they are sharing stories of each of the girls.)
9. Too pale to be the living. The color of zombies, a nation of zombies. (The Blood of the Conquistadores, p. 221)
(Chucha is the Haitian maid, superstitious and with customs different from the rest of the servants. She is the most loyal, however, and to her was entrusted the families holdings while they were in the U.S. She refers to the U.S. and its people as zombies because their skin is so pale and different from the skin of the people of Hispaniola. More importantly, she associates the paleness with lack of character, heritage, and life itself.)
10. That was the time Mami still talks about, when you "you almost got your father killed, Yoyo." (The Blood of the Conquistadores, p. 198)
(Yolanda makes up a story about her father having a gun, which turns out to be true, and tells it to an old general who lives next door. Having a weapon is against the law during the Trujillo regime, and the secret police come to the house to ask questions. An elaborate plan had been laid out in the event that the police would come looking for her father, a plan carried out perfectly saving Papi's life. Yolanda was spanked for what she had done but did not understand why until she was older.)

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 able to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Motivation

1. What do you think leads Carla to become a psychologist?
(Possible responses could include her close encounter with molestation, trying to make sense of life in two dramatically different cultures, her sister's breakdown, and realizing, as the oldest of four sisters who are burdened with a collective identity, the effects that treatment.)

Setting

2. Describe the differences between the climate and geography of New York and the Dominican Republic and how they influence the two cultures.

(The tropical environment of the Dominican Republic, complete with heat, lush vegetation, and beautiful people tends to bring people closer together. Although the classes are economically stratified, there seems to be a closeness between the people on the island, in particular the servants and the masters of the house. Families seem closer especially when they are needed to protect or nurture each other. New York's climate varies with heat in the summer and bitter cold winters. A common criticism of American people is their coldness to one another. This perception may be due to American individuality, luxury, and freedom combined with a focus on the material and economic success at the expense of family and community. The climate contributes to social isolation particularly during the extremes of the weather spectrum.)

Character Development

3. How does Yolanda change over time?
(Yolanda, along with each of the other sisters, matures over the course of the novel, yet retains elements of her youthful personality. She was an inquisitive child with a passion for reflection and writing which she uses in her careers as a teacher and an author. Her introduction presents a vibrant character seen exploring an alien place that she once called home; she savors her heritage and finds peace while visiting the island.)

Historical Milieu

4. How does the novel use the political history of the Dominican Republic as its backdrop?
(The legacy of General Trujillo, the history of the Dominican Republic, and U.S. regional policy at the time is as intertwined as the lives of the García family members. Trujillo's oppressive regime threatens the lives of the family, particularly Carlos, the father. Dominican domestic affairs force Carlos to become involved in the underground and demonstrate the role the U.S. played in the troubled country.)

Theme

5. How does love affect the plot?
(Although the family bickers and is often at odds, there is a closeness that can be felt throughout and a love that each one of them possesses for the others. The girls use their love to reconcile the differences between themselves and their parents; the parents clearly have a strong love for the girls and each other making sacrifices for the well-being and safety of their daughters.)

Interpretation

6. What is the significance of the title *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*?
(The significance of the title clearly refers the constant changes in their perspectives with regard to themselves, their homeland, their family, and each other. When the girls rally to the support of Sofia preventing her from increased involvement with Manuel, they are shedding a part of male-dominated, Dominican culture. Every event that distances the girls from the island can be regarded as a loss of accent. The 'accent' is lost as each matures, content in their worlds, a sense that straddles two cultures while parts of each culture are abandoned or adopted.)

Conflict

7. How does Yolanda battle the uncertainty of her writing career and her personal issues with relationships?
(Yolanda copes with conflict through careful reflection and determination. Determined not to fail as a writer, she continues to write but uses teaching as an outlet for creative expression. She does not allow herself to be trapped in unsatisfying personal relationships. Each of her challenges either becomes or seems to become less important when she returns to the Dominican Republic, suggesting that aspect of her 'accent' has not been lost.)

Atmosphere

8. How does Alvarez allow us to understand the entire family dynamic?
(Alvarez allows insight into each character by providing each of the girls with first-person narratives. Use of the first-person makes all events related more immediate and empathy-provoking. She shares each character's point of view. The narrator is constantly changing, occasionally creating confusion, but considering their intertwined relationships, one could often speak for another anyway.)

Author Purpose

9. Why does this novel appeal to so many different types of readers?
(This novel appeals to readers of all ages, sexes, and social positions. Everyone has felt confused and many have had to move from place to place like the characters in the novel. It appeals to Latinos generally and specifically, especially those who have moved for political or economic reasons sometimes from country to country. It appeals to young Americans who have had to deal with similar issues of fitting into a hostile world. It certainly appeals to women who can relate to one or another of the main characters. It appeals to fathers who love and watch their daughters grow up. It appeals to anyone who has a curiosity of politics and history and the ways those forces affect individual lives.)

Comparative Literature

10. How does *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* compare with other books written by Latin American women?
(Latin American women, while writing in completely different styles, often include similar themes that are important to women: family, love, and how they respond to the world around them. Isabel Allende's *House of the Spirits*, for example, tells the tale of a family similarly embroiled in the politics of a Latin American nation and how the women of the family share a close bond with each other in light of a society dominated by men. Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* tells the story of a young woman forced to live between Puerto Rico and New York in a similar fashion to the García sisters.)

How Language Works

Julia Alvarez frequently changes the narrators. One second she is recounting a story as Yolanda, and then she switches to Chucha, one of her sisters, etc. This emphasizes the interrelatedness of the characters. As each speaks, she firmly develops her own characterization.

1. After her good cry at the dinner table, the mother repeated the story. Carla, of course, knew the story well, and had analyzed it for unresolved childhood issues with her analyst husband. But she never tired of hearing it because it was her story, and whenever the mother told it, Carla knew she was the favorite of the moment.
2. At my place at the seminar table I unpacked my notebook and every one of the required and recommended texts which I had already bought, stacking them in front of me like my credentials.
3. I have said prayers to all the *santos*, to the *loa*, and to the Gran Poder de Dios, visiting each room, swinging the can of cleaning smoke, driving away all of the bad spirits that filled the house this day, and fixing in my head the different objects where they belong so that if any workman sneaks in and steals something I will know what is gone.

4. Gladys's singing stopped abruptly when I entered the dining room. "Ay, Carla, what a scare you gave me, girl!"
5. "Yolanda Altagracia, you forget yourself," came my mother's curtsy-when-you-say-hello voice, her puree-of-peas voice. "We have a fine yard that lots of other children would give their right arms to play in."

Across The Curriculum

Religion

1. Latin America is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. The religion was brought by Spanish and Portuguese missionaries from 1492 until the period of independence in the 1800's. A big part of Catholicism is the communion of the saints. Research the saints that are most important to Latin American countries and make a poster that depicts the saints most revered there. Include information about each saint and the countries where they are most highly regarded.
2. Write a paper that explores the history of the Virgin of Guadalupe and explain why the story is so appealing to Latin Americans.
3. The Dominican Republic shares an island with neighboring Haiti. While both nations are largely Roman Catholic, a strong African influence has also spawned other religious practices. Research voodoo and Santeria, explain their origins, and how they are practiced today.

Social Studies

1. Trujillo is known as a brutal *caudillo*. *Caudillos* are Latin American dictators that have had a profound impact in the shaping of modern day Latin America. Research the history of Trujillo and explain what positive contributions he made to the island and at what cost.
2. As brutal as Trujillo was, he was supported by the United States. Make a list of reasons why the U.S. supported this dictator and see if other Latin American dictators enjoyed similar American support despite their human rights records.

3. Explain the differences between the cultures of the United States and the Dominican Republic. How are they alike? How are they different? What are some good things that Americans could learn from the Dominican culture and vice versa?
4. Compile a list of conditions that have made Latin America susceptible to dictatorships.

Law

1. Create a list of laws that have been created in the United States to protect the rights of all citizens regardless of race, religion, creed, or sex. Reflect on whether or not those laws are followed in mainstream America.
2. Research the laws put in place by the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic. How would you react in that type of environment?

Psychology

1. Pretend that you are a child psychologist like Carla. Analyze the four sisters and give your opinion as to how each one is both similar and different.
2. Explain the benefits of having four sisters so close in age. Include some of the drawbacks in your discussion.
3. Explain the father's feelings about not having a son and what may have caused those feelings.

Geography and Culture

1. Draw a map of the Dominican Republic and highlight the five major cities of the island. Plot the distances between each of the five cities.
2. Create a map of the Dominican Republic which highlights the natural resources of the island and where they can be found.
3. Draw a mural which highlights aspects of life in the Dominican Republic and New York.
4. Research traditional Dominican and Spanish food and prepare them for the class. Some suggestions include: *paella*, *pastelon*, *arroz con pollo*, etc.

Education

1. Write a pamphlet that contains necessary information about life in the United States and your community for immigrants or newcomers to learn. Include social customs, male/female roles or behaviors, etc.
2. Write a dictionary of slang terms that you would give to someone who is learning English.
3. Organize a lesson plan on the history of the Dominican Republic. Note only major events and create a worksheet for the class to complete.

Mathematics and Computers

1. Using a desktop publishing program, create a website that describes the following: Santo Domingo, Trujillo, Carlos, Laura, Sofia, Yolanda, Sandra, Carla, Dr. Fanning, Dominican Republic, CIA, soul, psychoanalysis, chaperone, homesick, assimilation, immigration, welfare, Otto, Chucha, conquistador, *señor*, saints, *Virgen de Guadalupe*, Catholicism.
2. Research statistics regarding immigration from the Dominican Republic to the United States. List cities or regions with large Dominican populations.

Literature

1. Alvarez uses colorful language throughout the book. Compile a list of 20 adjectives she uses in the novel and use them in 20 new sentences.
2. Write a letter to Yolanda that offers her advice on relationships. Use excerpts from the book to guide your writing.
3. Write a brief paper on a title you would recommend after someone has read *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*. Describe how that title parallels or contrasts with this book.

Journalism

1. Write a personal ad for each of the four sisters from the novel describing their personalities, desires, experiences and the qualities they seek in a possible boyfriend.

2. Write a news article that explains Papi's role in the overthrow of Trujillo. Make sure that your article includes a catchy headline and a detailed description of what happened according to the book. Try to keep the article as objective as possible.

Drama

1. Imagine that this book was going to be turned into a movie. Prepare a list of actors that you would assign to play the different characters and give reasons supporting your choices.
2. Write a reenactment of a scene from the book with a small group. Present it to the class.
3. Create a movie poster for *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*. Include any information you feel is important and develop a catch phrase to advertise the film.

Alternate Assessment

1. Write character sketches for Papi, Mami, Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, Sofía, and Chucha.
2. Imagine what life is like for each of the characters listed above ten years after the events of the novel. Working with classmates, perform a skit how circumstances have changed for each of the characters.
3. Read another novel by Julia Alvarez and compare and contrast it to *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*.
4. Create a model of the compound where the García family lives in the Dominican Republic.
5. Read another book about life during a revolution and compare and contrast it to *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*.

Vocabulary

Complete each of the following sentences with a word from the list below. You may not use all of the answers below.

elusive	inane	vivaciousness	<i>novios</i>	skittish
attendant	maverick	monkey	Salome	swatted
waiter	concocted	indeterminable	<i>jamonas</i>	quipped
maitre d'	cows	calcium	exaggerated	lamented
communists	liberators	invariably	emulsify	exasperated

1. Yolanda laughs. A lot of names for such a little boy-the surnames of the country's three _____.
2. "She told us that she was being turned out of the human race. She was becoming a _____.
3. Good bulls sire _____.
4. When I went to college, my _____ ultimately worked against me.
5. The minute we step off the plane we see Mami has not _____.
6. Not to mention that it is out and out crazy that Fifi, the _____, is so changed.
7. Most of them divorce or stay _____ with nothing better to do than to take drugs and sleep around.
8. Girls are not to be left unchaperoned with their _____.
9. Together they _____ a speech: two brief pages of stale compliments and the polite commonplaces on teachers.
10. But if a grown up American of _____ age asked for directions,
(11.) _____ speaking too quickly, she simply she merely shrugged and smiled
an (12.) _____ smile.
13. President Kennedy looking worried too, was on the television at home, explaining that we might have to go to war against the _____.
14. At the entrance to the dining room, the _____ explained that Mrs. Fanning and her husband were on their way and to go ahead and order some drinks.
15. Her lips tightened. She set her teeth, top on bottom row, a _____ fortress.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

Match each of the following quotations from the novel with its speaker. Place the appropriate character on the line provided. Some of the choices will not be used.

- | | | | |
|----------------|---------------|-------------------|------------|
| A. Carla | F. Sandi | K. Manuel Gustavo | P. Gustavo |
| B. Dr. Fanning | G. Otto | L. Dr. Payne | Q. Monin |
| C. Mami | H. Rudy | M. Sister Zoe | R. Mundin |
| D. Papi | I. Tía Carmen | N. Mrs. Fanning | S. Ramona |
| E. Lucinda | J. Sofia | O. Yolanda | T. Mary |

- _____ 1. "Five candles, one for each year you have been away."
- _____ 2. "He is a good boy, is he not Papi?"
- _____ 3. "Good bulls sire cows."
- _____ 4. "In Mami's version of the story you met in Peru."
- _____ 5. "I just came to return your pencil."
- _____ 6. "Your sister wanted some new sneakers, they had to be red."
- _____ 7. "Why Yolanda dear, that is snow."
- _____ 8. "Why here you are sugar."
- _____ 9. "She had too much to drink, that's what she has had!"
- _____ 10. "We just didn't speak the same language."
- _____ 11. "Let us please go back home."
- _____ 12. "Let us not anticipate where the coconut will fall when the hurricane has not hit yet."
- _____ 13. "This is junk in your head. You have better things to do."
- _____ 14. "You have no right, no right at all, to go through my stuff or read my mail."
- _____ 15. "Don't you think that is the challenge of being alive?"

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements true or false.

- _____ 1. Sofia is the only one of the daughters to go to college.
- _____ 2. Carla met a pervert when she first came to the U.S.
- _____ 3. Papi was a doctor in the Dominican Republic.
- _____ 4. Laura did not like to invent things.
- _____ 5. Manuel Gustavo was Sofia's boyfriend.
- _____ 6. John was Yolanda's ex-husband.
- _____ 7. Yolanda had a frustrating love life.
- _____ 8. Sandi believed she was turning into a monkey.
- _____ 9. Papi was embarrassed at his birthday party by Sofia.
- _____ 10. Mrs. Fanning kissed Papi and Sandra saw it.

Part III: Fill In the Blanks (20 points)

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate answers.

- 1. Yolanda always wanted to become a _____.
- 2. Carla insisted on having _____ shoes a little girl.
- 3. An entire chapter of the book is a compilation of _____ of the four girls' childhood according to Mami.
- 4. Otto and Fifi met in _____.
- 5. Yolanda thought that _____ was radioactive fallout from a nuclear bomb.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Describe the girls' impressions of returning to the Dominican Republic.
- 2. What were some of the factors that caused Yolanda never to feel as if she were home in the U.S.?
- 3. Discuss the relationship between Mami, Papi and the girls.
- 4. Explain why you think Sandra had a breakdown.
- 5. Summarize the events that forced the García family to move to the United States.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Matching (30 points)

Match the following descriptions with the character it describes from the list below. You may use answers more than once or not at all.

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| _____ 1. has a mild breakdown | A. Mami |
| _____ 2. is almost molested in New York | B. Doña Charita |
| _____ 3. is known for attracting men | C. Papi |
| _____ 4. has a problem with love and relationships | D. Sandra |
| _____ 5. is always trying to invent something | E. Mrs. Fanning |
| _____ 6. was a doctor in the Dominican Republic | F. Carla |
| _____ 7. gets intoxicated at a dinner party | G. Yolanda |
| _____ 8. wants to marry Sofia | H. Manuel |
| _____ 9. helps Papi escape Trujillo's police | I. Chucha |
| _____ 10. the cousin Yolanda thinks looks like a call girl | J. Don Jose |
| _____ 11. becomes a psychologist | K. Tío Vic |
| _____ 12. met Don Jose in Madrid | L. Dr. Fanning |
| _____ 13. met her husband in Bogota, Colombia | M. Fifi |
| _____ 14. was very angry with letters he found | N. Lucinda |
| _____ 15. was a Haitian maid | O. Joe |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or sentence to answer the following questions.

- _____ 1. In what city did the Girls live in the United States?
- _____ 2. This grandfather worked for the United Nations.
- _____ 3. Who made people believe: "God and Trujillo are taking care of you."
- _____ 4. The patient and sweet nun who taught Yolanda.
- _____ 5. Trujillo's hated nickname.
- _____ 6. Who was a jealous boyfriend?
- _____ 7. Which character demanded red shoes as a child?
- _____ 8. How did Carla finally get red shoes?
- _____ 9. The place Yolanda really feels at home.
- _____ 10. The religion of the García family.

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select the phrase which best completes each sentence. Place the letter of the correct answer in the space provided to the left of the corresponding number.

- _____ 1. Sofia never
 - A. had degrees
 - B. had a clue about love
 - C. had red shoes
 - D. had ambition

- _____ 2. Yolanda's nickname was
 - A. Yoya
 - B. Jo Jo
 - C. Yoyo
 - D. Ya

- _____ 3. The man who tried to seduce Yolanda in college was
 - A. Joe
 - B. John
 - C. Rudy
 - D. Manuel

- _____ 4. Swore to defend the constitution
 - A. Mami
 - B. Yolanda
 - C. Carla
 - D. Papi

- _____ 5. Tía Carmen tries to defend the girls against
 - A. Papi
 - B. Mami
 - C. Manuel
 - D. the police

- _____ 6. The person who smuggled a gun for Papi was
 - A. Mundo
 - B. Vic
 - C. Mundin
 - D. Tía Carmen

- _____ 7. The country that Mami confuses Colombia with when recounting the story of Fifi and her German husband
 - A. Argentina
 - B. Bolivia
 - C. Ecuador
 - D. Peru

- _____ 8. The eldest of the four sisters is
 - A. Sofia
 - B. Carla
 - C. Sandra
 - D. Yolanda

- _____ 9. The name of Fifi's German husband is
 - A. Otto
 - B. Herman
 - C. Manuelito
 - D. Jose

- _____ 10. The old laundry maid is
 - A. Pila
 - B. Fila
 - C. Sandi
 - D. Chucha

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

- 1. Explain Papi's feelings about having four girls and no boys and how it seems to change in the story.
- 2. Contrast the parenting styles of Mami and Tía Carmen.
- 3. Describe the influence of Catholicism in Yolanda's attitude towards sex with Rudy.
- 4. Account for why Papi was upset at Yolanda's speech.
- 5. Explain reasons for the relationship between Haitians and Dominicans.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

- | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------|
| 1. liberators | 2. monkey | 3. cows |
| 4. vivaciousness | 5. exaggerated | 6. maverick |
| 7. <i>jamonas</i> | 8. <i>novios</i> | 9. concocted |
| 10. indeterminable | 11. invariably | 12. inane |
| 13. communists | 14. maitre d' | 15. calcium |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. E | 6. C | 11. A |
| 2. G | 7. M | 12. I |
| 3. D | 8. N | 13. K |
| 4. F | 9. B | 14. J |
| 5. H | 10. O | 15. L |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

Part III: Fill in the Blanks (20 points)

1. writer/poet
2. red
3. stories
4. Colombia
5. snow

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. C | 11. F |
| 2. F | 7. E | 12. B |
| 3. M | 8. H | 13. M |
| 4. G | 9. K | 14. C |
| 5. A | 10. N | 15. I |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

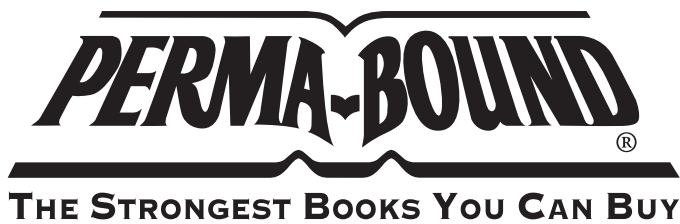
1. New York
2. Papito
3. Trujillo
4. Zoe
5. Chapita
6. Manuel
7. Carla
8. Painting a pair of white shoes
9. Dominican Republic
10. Roman Catholic

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. A | 6. B |
| 2. C | 7. D |
| 3. C | 8. B |
| 4. D | 9. A |
| 5. B | 10. A |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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