This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and award-winning children’s author. Visit her Web site at www.tracievaughnzimmer.com to find hundreds of other guides to children’s and young adult literature.

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

DISNEY • JUMP AT THE SUN

114 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011
www.hyperionteens.com
Sonia Rodriguez was born in California and plans to be the first in her family to graduate from high school and go to college. Her parents are Mexican immigrants. Her father has three Social Security numbers, and her mother is pregnant with twins. Sonia’s ama spends most her time in bed watching telenovelas while Sonia cooks for the family and cleans up after her four lazy brothers. Sonia’s papi works constantly to support the family. He’s the one person in her familia who understands his daughter’s big dreams. When Sonia has the audacity to put her schoolwork before her familia, her mother ships her off to visit her grandmother in Mexico, to experience “the ways of the old world.”

While in Mexico, Sonia learns some valuable life lessons from her wise, cigar-smoking grandma and her cousin Maria. She returns to El Norte more determined than ever to succeed in school. But the birth of her new siblings, inappropriate advances from her always-intoxicated uncle, and a forbidden relationship with a boy push her dreams to the back burner. If only Sonia could find the time to cook dinner, take care of the babies, secretly meet with her boyfriend, steer clear of her “drunkle,” and finish her homework, she just might be able to graduate from high school.

Pre-reading

Predict what Sonia’s secret is. Do you think everyone has a secret? Why do people have secrets?

Questions to Consider

1. Make a list of everything you learn about Sonia in the first chapter. What is the most important thing to know about Sonia? What is the most important thing to know about you?

2. What expectations are placed on Sonia as the daughter in the family? How do her mother, aunt, and uncle treat her? How many chores do you do for your family, by comparison?

3. Sonia believes that “education isn’t just about a dumb piece of paper to me. It’s also about freedom and power. An education means I won’t have to be any macho man’s two-breasted slave.” (p. 34) Despite her belief, she is often waylaid from her goal. Why? Is she partially to blame?

4. Would you trust a super-handsome, sappy-line-spilling boy (or girl) like Geraldo? Why? How does he prove himself to Sonia? Do you, like Geraldo, believe that romance is “written in the stars?”

5. Describe Sonia’s relationship with her papi. How does he represent everything that a, as Sonia says, “real Latino should be.” Are the qualities of a good father universal through all cultures and societies?
Does Sonia’s perspective increase your understanding of the immigrant (especially Mexican) experience? Is she justified in believing that many whites are hypocrites because “they want their lettuce picked, their houses cleaned, gym towels washed, but they don’t want to give the people who do these things a good salary or job benefits”? (p. 81)

Race relations are an important component of the story. What kind of racism does Sonia face? What does she recognize as racism within her own family? How do kids who are raised with prejudices overcome them?

How can Papi’s advice, “Do not stoop to their level” be good advice in a wide variety of circumstances? What else has Sonia’s papi taught her? How does he come to need his own advice?

Sonia is terrorized by her “drunkle.” She feels powerless to speak against him and even to fight back when attacked. How could she have gained more power in her life and family? How is justice finally restored?

Why do you think the author chose to move the story, at least temporarily, to Mexico? How did it expand Sonia’s worldview and understanding of her family and culture? How did it expand your thinking?

Explain Sonia’s nickname, tortuguita. Her abuelito tells her “it is not the turtle’s shell that protects it. It’s the turtle’s wisdom.” (p. 197) How does Sonia develop wisdom over the course of the story? Does she, like the fable, come out ahead in the end?

Geraldo tells Sonia, “Sometimes I kind of feel . . . one of my feet is on a boat and the other is on a dock, and I can’t step on to either side; I’m just caught in the middle.” (p. 226) Do you think all immigrants feel this way? Have you ever felt like you didn’t belong?

Projects

READING
A reader learns about a character in different ways illustrated in the chart below. Find an example of each (include page numbers) to show how you get to know Sonia, and how she changes over time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sonia Rodriguez</th>
<th>What She Says</th>
<th>What She Does</th>
<th>How Others See Her</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IN THE BEGINNING</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IN THE END</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WRITING
Write an Op/Ed piece based on some issue from the novel. Be sure to support your opinion with facts and evidence.
-or-
Study the writing of Alan Lawrence Sitomer. What have you learned that you can apply to your next piece of original writing?

SOCIAL STUDIES
Study the issue of immigration in the United States. How has immigration law changed over time? How does immigration influence the economy? Create a pamphlet, PowerPoint presentation, or poster about what you learned.

ART
Create a piece of art (collage or sculpture) inspired by Sonia’s story. In a brief artist’s statement explain why you chose the colors, forms, and images you did to represent her story.
1. **What type of research did you have to do to bring Sonia’s story to life?**

I did a heck of a lot of research for this book, and most of it came through firsthand interviews with my students. Many of the kids I teach at Lynwood High School are first-generation immigrants themselves, and they have so many amazing, passionate, and sometimes harrowing, stories to tell that bringing Sonia’s book to life became fairly easy for me. Obviously, Sonia’s story is fiction, but I pulled a great deal of information from the very real lives of many of my kids to weave this tale. In truth, the hard part was cutting back all of the wonderful stuff I had available to me to best serve the needs of the story. Much of the subject matter comes from the mouths of real people who have really experienced things like border crossings, south-of-the-border poverty, and close (and claustrophobic) family relations. Not only was the research a ton of fun for me, but it opened my eyes to an amazing and fascinating culture.

2. **Is it difficult for you to write through the eyes of a female character? How do you build your believable characters?**

The truth is, I believe we are all people, and my feeling is that if I approach the writing of a book from the perspective of being a human first and foremost, the gender will take care of itself. More important to me is the story, the characters, the drama, and the humor. But we are so much more alike than we are unalike—as races, genders, and so on—that writing from a female’s perspective never really felt like an issue to me. Then again, I have a lot of voices trapped inside my head and writing is really one of the only ways I can let them all out. And if I don’t write, I walk down the streets muttering to myself.

Better to bring people like Sonia to life, don’t you think?

3. **What can your fans look forward to next?**

My next aim is to revolutionize the classroom in America, so that kids don’t feel so bored by school. Goodness knows how many incredible ways there are to teach and learn in this world, and right now, I think American schools suffer from a virus called “boring-itis”—so I am going to try to cure it. Look, learning can be a lot of fun—if you are learning about things that bring you joy and fulfillment and satisfaction. And my personal opinion is that we need to bring more fun, more energy, more pizzazz back into our classrooms.

On the book front, I’ve got a couple of things up my sleeve, but for the moment, I think students all across the country are going to shout out a big “Hallelujah!” if I can help shift school into an environment that resembles a place of joy and personal fulfillment instead of a place of dread and “boringness.”

www.alanlawrencesitomer.com