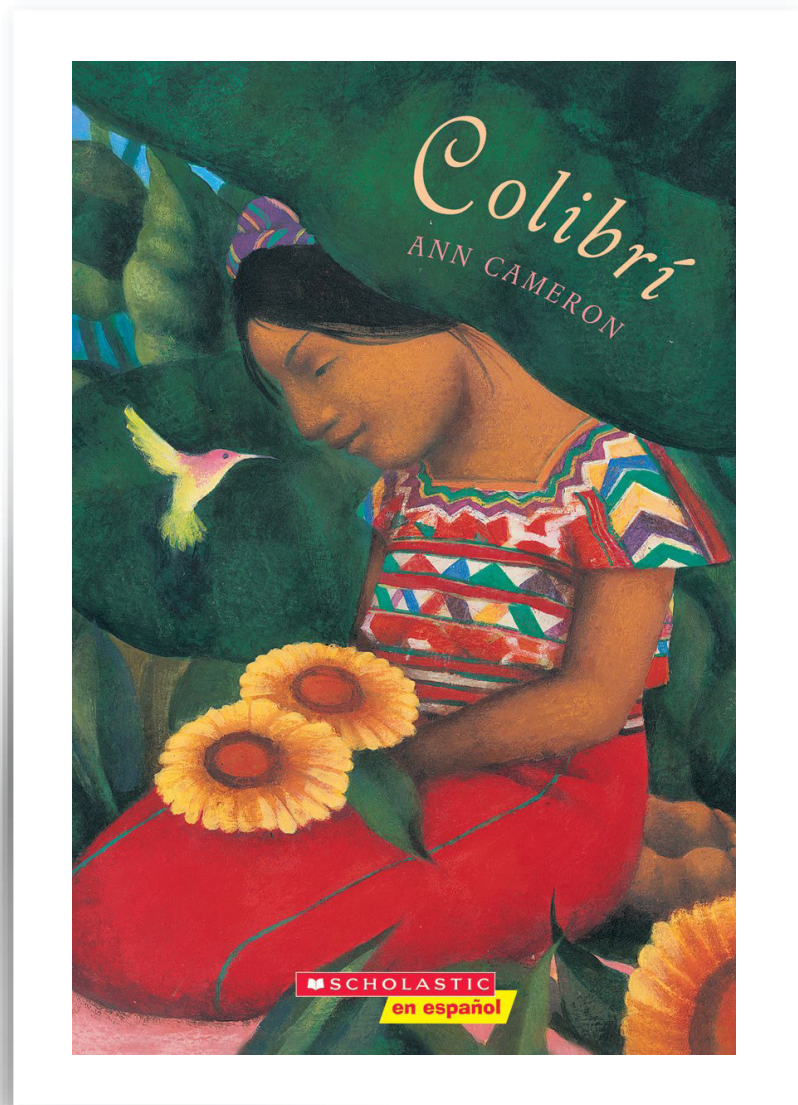


VAMOS A LEER

teaching latin america through literacy



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Educator's Guide

Colibrí

Written by Ann Cameron

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Age Level: 12 and up



BOOK SUMMARY

She was little and quick and pretty. Her mother nicknamed her Colibrí, Spanish for "Hummingbird." At age four she was kidnapped, torn from her parents on a crowded bus in Guatemala City. Since then she's traveled with "Uncle," the ex-soldier and wandering beggar who has renamed her Rosa. Uncle has always told Rosa that he searched for her parents but had no success. There's almost no chance Rosa will ever find them, but Rosa still remembers and longs for them.

When she was young, Uncle consulted fortune-tellers who told him that Rosa would bring him luck – a treasure big enough to last him all his life. So he's kept her with him. Together, they have traveled from town to town in the highlands of Guatemala, scraping out a living, hoping to find the treasure. Eight years have passed, and Rosa has turned twelve. No treasure has been found, and Uncle has almost given up hope. When he turns angry and desperate, danger threatens Rosa from all side, but especially from Uncle himself.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:

- A Junior Literary Guild Selection
- A School Library Journal Best Book of the Year
- A Booklist Editor's Choice
- An American Library Association Notable Book
- A Notable Book for a Global Society Award, International Reading Association

AUTHOR'S CORNER

About Ann Cameron:

Ann Cameron was born in Rice Lake, Wisconsin in 1943. As a child, Cameron spent a lot of time doing outdoor activities. For Cameron these childhood activities as motivation for outdoor motifs in her books because



she feels that children today tend to lack this element during childhood. Also, she has used people, particularly her older sister, and experience at her family's summer home as inspiration for her work. Reading and listening to the radio as a child also served to inspire her imagination.

After high school, Cameron attended Harvard University during a pivotal time in American history. She has cited attending Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech at the university as well as her participation in a freedom ride to Maryland in the 1960s. She also listened to influential poets give readings at Harvard, and she even studied with the poet Robert Lowell. Upon graduation, Cameron moved to New York where she worked for a publisher, but she decided that she wanted to learn more about writing. Thus, she returned to the Midwest to receive her Master of Fine Arts from the University of Iowa. She released her first children's book, *The Seed*, in 1974.

After several moves, Cameron landed in Panajachel, Guatemala. Over the course of fifteen years, Cameron and her husband worked with locals, international donors, and private organizations to improve the library in Panajachel, which is now recognized as one of the best in Central America

Cameron shared the following on how Colibrí can be used in the classroom:

Ann Cameron's discussion of how Colibrí can be used in the classroom from her [website](#):

"In social studies classes Colibrí is a winner: it's authentic to geography, history, and daily life in Guatemala and to Mayan customs (both current and historical). Teachers of middle grade students might use the novel to encourage reflection on the pressures young U.S. teens feel to conform and how they at times resist in order to find their truer selves.

Colibrí is based on my twenty years of experience living among the Mayan people. Every detail of customs and beliefs was checked with Mayan sources. The wartime massacre described briefly in the book is one that actually took place at a plantation called "La Hortensia," near Nebaj, Guatemala. Major events of the book—a child kidnapping and the theft of a statue from a church—are unfortunately frequent happenings here and are a common topic of articles in Guatemalan newspapers. All the places in the book are real, though some names and locations are changed. The place

described as "Two Rivers" is in a Guatemalan national park, "Semuc Champey." "San Sebastián" resembles the town where I lived, Panajachel.

Uncle kidnaps Tzunún because he believes he can sell her to unscrupulous characters who arrange foreign adoptions of kidnapped children. Guatemala holds the dubious honor of having the highest per-capita number of foreign adoptions in the world. Adoptive parents pay up to \$30,000 to arrange adoptions. That attracts criminals, so sometimes children are kidnapped and sold into adoption; as many as 15 child kidnappings are reported each month. The government fights this evil and on occasion the newspapers have stories of clandestine baby nurseries being discovered or of DNA testing resulting in a baby being returned to the mother. The U.S. Embassy requires DNA testing as well as face-to-face interviews with the natural mother before issuing a visa to the baby. Spain, Canada and the Netherlands will not approve adoptions from Guatemala. The vast majority of the adoptions are legal. Most U.S. adoptive parents have met the biological parents of the children they adopt and are rightly sure about the legitimacy of the adoption. In the event children adopted from Guatemala are in your school, I think this subject should be handled with great care.

What I most wanted to capture in the book, though, is the reality that newspapers and maps can't express: the courage and generosity of Guatemalan people, and the way faith, mystery, magic and dream is a vital part of their lives. The novel is an adventure story, but most of all it's a study in identity formation and the development of autonomy in a girl--a young girl becoming a teenager and learning to take upon herself the responsibility for who she is and becomes. This is a universal experience of both sexes, and I think will be very meaningful to middle school readers."

For more information, please visit Ann Cameron's [website](#).

**USING *Colibrí*
IN THE
CLASSROOM**

With nothing but positive reviews, it's not surprising that *Colibrí* was a great read. It's a well-written and engrossing novel. Told from the point of view of Tzunún, a 12 year-old girl, students will find it easy to connect with the young narrator. It's not a light read; instead, it offers a coming of age story that shows a young girl forced to make decisions that we would hope only adults might have to confront. Yet this is part of the power of the book. Often our students do have to deal with situations that we wish we could protect them from, but can't. Tzunún's journey to find out who she really is may give those students some much needed hope, and a story they can learn from and identify with.

Fear is a theme throughout the novel and a powerful force in Tzunún's life. Often her fear controls her, but Tzunún must learn to conquer her fear in order to survive and live the life she desires. In our classrooms, we don't often talk about fear or how to confront it, yet it's something many children need help with. *Colibrí* provides a rich opportunity to have this

discussion with our students. An important struggle for Tzunún is how to determine what is right or wrong, and how to make the choices that she feels are morally acceptable. Often Uncle asks her to do things that she is not okay with, but out of fear she does anyway. A significant turning point in the story takes place when Tzunún chooses to no longer do Uncle's bidding. Tzunún makes the choice to confront her fear and risk an unknown future on her own. In doing this, Tzunún sets herself on the path to find out who she really is. Despite the fact that she's quite young, Tzunún's choices shape the path her life takes. What we learn is that just because one is young, does not mean that the choices and decisions he or she makes don't have life-altering ramifications.

Taking place in Guatemala, the setting provides a context that is likely unique and engaging for many of our students. With references to Guatemalan culture woven throughout the story, the novel provides a great way to bring knowledge of Guatemalan foods, terminology, ethnicity, traditions, beliefs and religion into the classroom. It could easily be implemented in a social studies unit on Latin America. Cameron shows important aspects of both Latino and Mayan culture. Through the various characters in Tzunún's life, Cameron demonstrates not only the ways in which these two cultures have blended, but also the continued oppression of Mayan people and ethnic struggle in Guatemala. While not a significant part of the story, the novel does allude to the military violence of the Guatemalan Civil War, so this historical theme could be expanded upon if appropriate for the teaching context.

Aside from the emotionally moving story of Tzunún, Cameron's novel also provides an excellent mentor text from which to teach the art of sensuously descriptive writing. Her words paint beautiful pictures of Guatemalan landscapes. She never forgets to describe the smells, tastes, sounds or tactile aspects of Tzunún's experiences. *Colibrí* is another novel I'd love to see in our classrooms and libraries. I'd recommend it without hesitation.

LESSON PLANS & ACTIVITIES

The following lesson plans are comprised of two sections:

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

In addition to these lesson plans, there is a section of “Questions for Discussion” at the back of the Random House Reader’s Circle Paperback Edition; along with “A Conversation with Ann Cameron” that both provide excellent material for class discussions.

Common Core Standards Addressed:

K-12

Reading

Key Ideas and Details

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure

- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

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

Writing

Text Types and Purposes

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient

Social Studies and History

evidence.

- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Production and Distribution of Writing

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Geography:

Find Guatemala on a map. As you read *Colibrí*, find the places that Tzunún and Uncle travel to. Are any of the places in the novel imaginary? Use Ann Cameron's discussion of *Colibrí* found in our Author's Corner above for more information on the locations. Ask students how they would have felt if they were Tzunún and moved around that much.

The Maya:

Tzunún and her family are Mayan, and this an important part of the story. Many students may not be knowledgeable about who the Maya are, their history, or their cultural traditions. Using appropriate print or online resources have students research the Maya, creating a poster presentation, essay, or some other form for communicating what they've learned. This could be done in small groups or individually. Brown University put together the following unit: [Culture Connect: Experience the Culture of the World](#), which would also be useful. One section of this unit is dedicated to the Maya of Guatemala, focusing on their tradition of weaving. This provides a more structured lesson plan for the entire class to participate in as a whole group.

Other lesson plans and resources on the Maya can be found at:

- http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/art/maya_6-07.html
- http://pa.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_2_17313_2059_285531_43/http%3B/pubcontent.state.pa.us/publishedcontent/publicsh/cop_environment/phmc/communities/extranet/archaeology/curriculumcontent/supplemental_maya1.pdf

Rigoberta Menchú and Human Rights Activism in Guatemala:

In *Colibrí* Ann Cameron alludes to the violence and human rights abuses many Guatemalans suffered during the Guatemalan Civil War. Depending upon the grade level of students reading the book, it may be appropriate to delve deeper into the details of this period of Guatemalan history.

Rigoberta Menchú, an indigenous woman from Guatemala, is well known for her efforts to expose the human rights violations suffered by many indigenous peoples in Latin America. In 1992 she won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work. There are a number of resources available to help teach about her efforts:

- Teaching Tolerance: <http://www.tolerance.org/activity/rigoberta-mench>
- Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights: <http://curriculum.rfkcenter.org/curriculums/30?locale=en>
- The My Hero Project: http://www.myhero.com/go/hero.asp?hero=r_menchu

Guided Reading Questions

Chapter 1 | Pages 3-7

1. Why does Uncle call Tzunún Rosa? What is her real name? Make a prediction: why do you think her real name is a secret? (p. 3)
2. What has the ability to crack the large boulders open? Why is this so surprising? (p. 4)
3. What does ladino mean? What does Uncle claim makes him moody? (p. 4) If it were true, why would Uncle's Mayan blood hate his Spanish blood? What would the Mayan and the Spanish be fighting over?
4. What does Uncle begin to pretend as soon as they get to Nebaj? (p. 6)
5. What is different about the blind man and his daughter that Tzunún sees in town? How does Uncle respond to the man? What do you think he means when he says "Stupid Sheep! . . . Blind, and he isn't even getting the value out of it"? (p. 7)

Chapter 2 | Pages 8-13

1. How are the women and girls dressed differently than the men? (p. 8)
2. How does Uncle change when he plays the part of a blind beggar? What do people believe about him? (p. 11)
3. What was the first job that Tzunún's mother ever taught her? How does this interfere with her work with Uncle? (p. 13)

Chapter 3 | Pages 14-21

1. Why do you think Tzunún is crying? (p. 16-17)
2. What does the man give Tzunún? Do you think Uncle will let her keep it? (p. 17-18)
3. What does Uncle do to get Tzunún to give him the hundred quetzal bill? (p. 19)

Chapter 4 | Pages 22-30

1. What does Tzunún dream about? What do you think the dream means? What does Uncle believe Tzunún is going to do for him? (p. 22-23)
2. After Uncle orders breakfast, Tzunún gets the impression that the other customers are saying something uncomplimentary about Uncle. What do you think they might have said? (p. 25)
3. What is Uncle looking for that he asks a question about? What is a Day-Keeper? (p. 26-27)

Chapter 5 | Pages 31-37

1. What is the most important thing to Uncle? (p. 31)
2. What does Tzunún's name mean? Why do you think the book is titled Colibrí? (p. 32)
3. Why do you think Tzunún has such a hard time saying Uncle? (p. 32)
4. What do you think Uncle was hoping to do with Tzunún? Why? (p. 34-35)
5. What does Uncle learn from the fortune teller at the fair? (p. 35-36)
6. Why does Uncle continue to keep Tzunún? (p. 36-37)

Chapter 6 | Pages 38-45

1. Where does Señora Tuc believe she has seen Uncle before? Do you think he is telling the truth? Why or why not? (p. 41-42)
2. What does Uncle learn about his birth date? Do you think the things Señora Tuc says are true descriptions of Uncle? (p. 44)

Chapter 7 | Pages 46-51

1. What does Señora Tuc use to answer Uncle's question? (p. 46)
2. What is Uncle's question? (p. 47) What answer does he receive? (p. 48-49)
3. What does Uncle owe Tzunún? Make a prediction: What do you think is on it? (p.48)
4. What happens when Uncle pays Señora Tuc? How does she communicate that she knows he is cheating her? (p. 50-51)

Chapter 8 | Pages 52-57

1. What does Uncle buy for Tzunún? Do you think this is the little paper that Señora Tuc meant? (p. 53-54)

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2. How does Tzunún feel when Uncle gives the old lady the fake money? Do you think she should have said something? What would the consequences have been? What would you have done? (p. 54-55)

Chapter 9 | Pages 58-64

1. Where does Tzunún end up going? (p. 59)
2. What happened at La Hortensia? Why is it important to Señora Tuc/Doña Celestina? (p. 60-63)

Chapter 10 | Pages 65-69

1. What is Tzunún afraid is in her throat? What does Doña Celestina find? (p. 65)
2. How does Doña Celestina know that Tzunún is not stupid? What is she going to do for Tzunún's words? (p. 66)
3. Do you think Uncle respects Tzunún? Why? (p. 68)
4. Does Tzunún want to leave Uncle? Why do you think she feels this way? (p. 68-69)

Chapter 11 | Pages 70-75

1. Where would Tzunún like to stay? Can Doña Celestina take her? Why? What is she afraid would happen? (p. 70-73)
2. What does Doña Celestina give back to Tzunún? (p. 74)

Chapter 12 | Pages 76-78

1. The lump is no longer in Tzunún's throat, where is it now? Why do you think it has moved? What does this mean? (p. 76)
2. Why does Uncle want to leave Nebaj? What does Uncle value above all else in the world? (p. 77)
3. Where are Tzunún and Uncle going to from Nebaj? (p. 78)

Chapter 13 | Pages 79-84

1. What does Tzunún remember while on the bus with Uncle? What do you think triggers this memory? (p. 81-83)
2. What did Tzunún used to believe about why her parents had lost her? Does she still believe this? (p. 84)

Chapter 14 | Pages 85-89

1. What happens to the cup of hot chocolate with the hearts on it? What does Tzunún believe this represents? Why does she ask for the pieces? (p. 86-88)

Chapter 15 | Pages 90-95

1. What does Uncle think of the foreigners or the tourists that come to visit Guatemala? How does he describe them? (p. 91)
2. Describe Raimundo. Does he look like Uncle? How is he different? (p. 92)
3. What does it mean to have a long tongue and a long nose? (p. 93)

Chapter 16 | Pages 96-103

1. To what saint does Raimundo have an altar for? Describe what it looks like. What does this saint represent? How does this show that Raimundo and Uncle value the same things? (p. 97-98)
2. What does tango sound like to Tzunún? How does it make her feel to dance tango? (p. 101-103)

Chapter 17 | Pages 104-106

1. What does Uncle say to Raimundo about Tzunún? Do you think he is correct? How would you describe Tzunún? (p. 105)

Chapter 18 | Pages 107-112

1. How is Dolores different from other women that Tzunún has seen? (p. 109)
2. Think about the things that Tzunún is grateful for at Raimundo's. Are these things that you would think about if someone asked you if you were comfortable, or are they things that you take for granted? (p. 109)

Chapter 19 | Pages 113-116

1. Why does Tzunún become anxious after she buys the shoes?
2. Why do you think Tzunún feels more comfortable in the mountains helping the family? (p. 114-116)

Chapter 20 | Pages 117-126

1. Do you think Dolores warning about her brother is accurate? Why? (p. 120)
2. What are Uncle and Raimundo teaching Tzunún to do? Do you think it's a game? (p. 121-122)
3. How does Raimundo justify stealing the passports to Tzunún? Does Tzunún believe him? (p. 123-126)

Chapter 21 | Pages 127-138

1. Do you think Raimundo and Uncle really bought the dog? Why?(p. 128)
2. What are Raimundo, Uncle and Tzunún going to do at the church? Do you believe Raimundo when he says that they are going to get the statue fixed and then return it? Do you think it really has

- termites? (p. 129-131)
3. What do you think of the statement “There are no criminals at all in San Sebastian”? What is ironic about Raimundo saying this? (p. 131)
 4. How does Tzunún attempt to justify taking the statue? What does she say to it? (p.136-137)
 5. How does Tzunún figure out what she must do? What do you think she decides? (p. 137-138)

Chapter 22 | Pages 139-148

1. What decision does Tzunún make about the statue? Who does she go to? (p. 139-141)
2. What is Tzunún worried about? Do you think you would worry about the same thing? (p. 140-141)
3. Who catches Uncle and Raimundo stealing the statue? What happens to them? (p. 144-147)

Chapter 23 | Pages 149-152

1. Where does Tzunún go after Raimundo and Uncle are taken to jail? (p. 149) Who finds her there? (p. 151)
2. Who does Tzunún take with her for protection? (p. 152)

Chapter 24 | Pages 153-155

1. What does Tzunún name the dog? What does the name mean? (p. 154)
2. Where do they spend the night? (p. 154)

Chapter 25 | Pages 156-158

1. Why do you think Tzunún is worried about Uncle? (p. 156-157)
2. How do you think the man is moving the dogs? What do you think the metal bar really is? How does it work? Is it magic? (p. 157-158)
3. What do you think will make Tzunún happy? (p. 158)

Chapter 26 | Pages 159-164

1. Do you think Marcos knows that it was Tzunún who helped to stop the robbery? Why? (p. 162-163)

Chapter 27 | Pages 165-171

1. What lesson does Marcos teach Tzunún about money? How does he teach her? (p. 166-168)

Chapter 28 | Pages 172-177

1. Does Tzunún make it to Nebaj? What condition is she in when she

-
- arrives at Doña Celestina's home? (p. 173-175)
 2. Who is taking care of Tzunún? (p. 174-176)

Chapter 29 | Pages 178- 181

1. What good has come out of Uncle committing the crime? (p. 179)
2. What advice do Doña Celestina and Doña Amalia give Tzunún about fear? (p. 179-180)
3. What do they do to try and get more information about Tzunún's past and where she's from? Does it work? (p. 181)

Chapter 30 | Pages 182-188

1. What does Doña Celestina do to try and protect Tzunún from Raimundo and Uncle? (p. 182-183)
2. What kinds of jobs does Tzunún do for Doña Amalia and Doña Celestina? (p. 184)
3. How does Doña Celestina help Tzunún make peace with the woman from the market? (p. 187-188)

Chapter 31 | Pages 189-195

1. What memories does Tzunún have of making tortillas? Have you ever had an experience like that? (p.189-190)
2. How does Tzunún conquer her fear and return to Doña Amalia with the mint? (p. 191-193)
3. What is the butterfly a sign of? (p. 194)

Chapter 32 | Pages 196-200

1. What warnings do Doña Celestina and Tzunún receive that Uncle is going to come back? (p. 197-199)
2. Do you think that Doña Celestina is really calm? How do you know? (p. 200)

Chapter 33 | Pages 201-206

1. Where are they going on 13 Q'anil? Why are they going there? (p. 202-204)
2. Why do you think that J'aal is hesitant to leave Tzunún? (p. 206)

Chapter 34 | Pages 207-210

1. Who is the skinny man that Tzunún sees? (p.208)
2. Where does Tzunún find to hide? (p. 209-210)

Chapter 35 | Pages 211-213

1. What does Tzunún find in the cave? (p. 212?)
2. How does Uncle find Tzunún? (p. 213)

Chapter 36 | Pages 214-216

1. What happened to Raimundo? Who does Uncle blame? (p. 215)
2. How did Uncle fool the people into telling him where Tzunún was? (p. 215)
3. What does Uncle finally admit to Tzunún? (p. 216)

Chapter 37 | Pages 217-222

1. What is Uncle going to do to Tzunún? How does she respond? How does this show she's changed? (p. 217-218)
2. What do you think Uncle will do when Tzunún reaches for the paper? (p. 220-221)
3. Who saves Tzunún? What happens to Uncle? (p. 222)

Chapter 38 | Pages 223-224

1. What is on the little paper from Uncle's wallet? Why is this important to Tzunún? (p. 224)

Chapter 39 | Pages 225-227

1. Does Tzunún tell anyone about the treasure? What would you have done? (p. 225)
2. Will Tzunún get to keep J'aal? Why do you think her previous owners would let her stay with Tzunún? (p. 226)
3. What is Tzunún's reunion with her parents like? (p. 226-227)

Reflective Writing Questions

Below you'll find questions that allow for more of an extended response. Also, be sure to check out the "Questions for Discussion" included at the end of the novel, there are great questions provided there that we didn't duplicate here. Those are also perfect for extended response or essay style responses.

1. Why do you think Tzunún feels like she has something stuck in her throat? Think about the times that she feels it the most, what is she trying to do? Do you really think that she has something in her throat? What do you think is making her feel this way?
2. Think about fear as a theme in the novel. How does fear control Tzunún? Have you ever been afraid like Tzunún? How did you deal with it?
3. How does Tzunún change over the course of the novel? Use examples from the story to support your answer.

ABOUT US & THIS GUIDE

The Latin American & Iberian Institute (LAI) receives resources from the U.S. Department of Education to support K-12 teaching about Latin America. Our goal is to provide a supportive environment for teaching across grade levels and subject areas so educators can bring regional and linguistic knowledge of Latin America into their classrooms. For more information and materials that support teaching about Latin America in the classroom, visit our website at <http://laii.unm.edu/outreach>

Written by staff at the LAI, **Vamos a Leer Educator's Guides** provide an excellent way to teach about Latin America through literacy. Each guide is based upon a book featured in the Vamos a Leer book group. For more on Vamos a Leer, visit our blog at bit.ly/vamosaleer. This guide was prepared by Katrina Dillon, LAI Project Assistant.

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