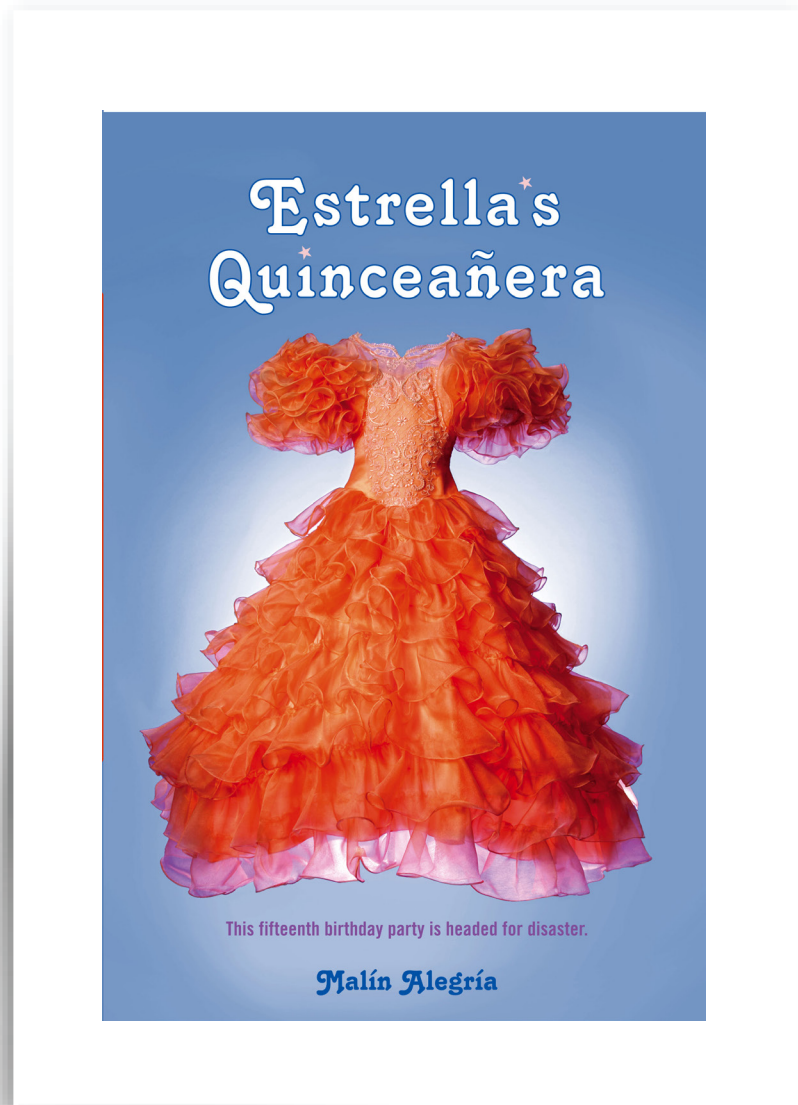


VAMOS A LEER

teaching latin america through literacy



VAMOS A LEER

Educator's Guide

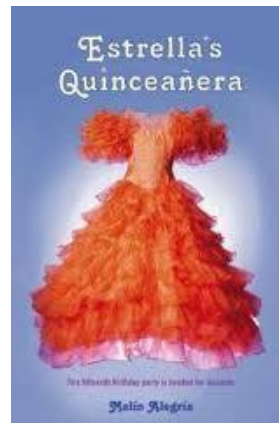
Estrella's Quinceañera

Written by Malín Alegría

Published by Simon & Schuster, 2006

ISBN: 9780689878091

Ages: 12 and up



BOOK SUMMARY

Estrella Alvarez is turning fifteen, and she's not happy about it. For as long as she can remember, her mother has been planning an elaborate quinceañera, complete with a mariachi band, cheesy decorations, and a hideous dress. Estrella is so over it. She'd much rather have an understated party at a posh restaurant downtown—that way, she can invite her two best friends from private school, who have no idea Estrella lives in the barrio. Even though Estrella tries to keep her home life a secret from her school friends, things get even more complicated when she falls for speedy, a cholo whom her friends—and her parents—would definitely disapprove of.

Caught between her family's wishes and the allure of her sophisticated friends, Estrella is forced to make tough choices. This funny touching book follows one girl's struggle to figure out who she really wants to be.

AUTHOR'S CORNER

A little bit about Malín Alegría in her own words. . .

I grew up in the eclectic Mission district of San Francisco: a historically immigrant community known for its rich Latino culture, colorful murals, and leftist politics. The Mission was much more ethnically diverse and full of artists while I was growing up in the eighties. It was the only place you could get a black bean tofu burrito with sprouts. Salsa music and *carne asada* spun in the air at all hours of the night. My parents were community activist, educators, and artists. As the oldest of four siblings, I was in charge of the activities or tricks we played in the neighborhood. Saturday mornings were filled with magical adventures and fun. We'd play Mexican wrestling, act out court cases, and put on our own community theater projects. It was easy because we were all very loud, highly dramatic, and passionate about life, love, and social causes.



Growing up I refused to have a quince. The quinceañera, with all its fluff, was the epitome of everything I was against. It was gaudy, girlie, and way too Mexican for me. At fourteen I suffered from a major identity crisis. I hated the way I looked. My skin was too dark and my boobs were too small. All my friends wore designer outfits from the mall, while I had to wear my grandmother's handmade clothes. I'd lie about where I lived, what my parents did for a living, and where I was from. Why? Because I wanted to be cool. I wanted to be like the girls on TV, in teen magazines, and the books I read at school. They were popular and always got the cute boys. I used to wonder if there was some top-secret rulebook for being cool. Deep down I wanted to be a blond cheerleader, with a red convertible, and a hot football player for a boyfriend. I thought that would make me happy. What I really wanted was to be accepted.

I've always been a storyteller. But then again, I had no choice. My father was very strict. He believed that TV rotted the brain. As a child I always felt deprived. I never got to watch enough Smurfs or Thundercats cartoons. I was very lucky that my parents were highly creative and resourceful. They taught me how to perceive the mundane cardboard box into a puppet theater or my very own TV show. Growing up I entertained my siblings by acting out stories with paper dolls, making my own comic strips, skits, or home movies. Storytelling was something I did for fun. It fed my spirit. It wasn't until I took a creative writing course in college that I realized that I had to take my passion seriously. Yet, I still wasn't sure about what I wanted to do as a career, so I went into education. I've been an educator for the past eight years. I love working with learners of all ages. Writing, storytelling, and drama have been central themes throughout my profession. The most gratifying thing is to inspire someone to find and share their own stories.

In addition to my parents, Rudolfo Anaya was a great inspiration to me as a Chicana author. He was the first Chicano author I read in high school. I remember thinking it was so cool to see someone who looked like me on the back of a book. However, what really stayed with me all these years is his bio. In it he revealed that it took him many drafts to complete the book *Bless me Ultima*. By that time I'd given up my dream of being a writer, because I wasn't very good in English Lit. It was burning me, because I had all these stories clogged up inside me. But after reading his bio I realized that with persistence and hard work I too could become a writer. It was a totally transformative experience! (Taken from <http://www.MalínAlegría.com/about/faq>)

For more on Alegría and *Estrella's Quinceañera* check out the links below:

- [NPR article](http://www.npr.org/2011/10/18/141428890/ya-author-celebrates-growing-up-latino-in-the-usa), “Author Malín Alegría Builds On 'Estrella's' Star Power” at <http://www.npr.org/2011/10/18/141428890/ya-author-celebrates-growing-up-latino-in-the-usa>
- [Alegría's website](#)
- [Alegría's blog](#)

Students can also write to Alegría. From her website: “I love to get email and answer questions for school assignments. You can write me directly at: MalínAlegría@gmail.com.”

**USING
ESTRELLA'S
QUINCEAÑERA
IN THE
CLASSROOM**

Summary:

For as long as Estrella Alvarez can remember, her mother has been planning to throw her an elaborate quinceañera for her fifteenth birthday -- complete with a mariachi band, cheesy decorations, and a hideous dress. Just thinking about her quince makes Estrella cringe. But her mother insists that it's tradition.

Estrella has other things on her mind, anyway -- like dating Speedy. Does it matter that her new friends -- and her parents -- would never approve of a guy from el barrio? Estrella's almost fifteen and wants to start making her own decisions. But is she ready to find out who she is -- and who she really wants to be?

Estrella's Quinceañera was recommended to me last year by a local middle school principal who had heard about the book and its [positive reviews on NPR](#). It sounded like a perfect book for our [Vamos a Leer book group](#), so we put it on our reading list for this year. The book was a quick and enjoyable read, and while I was processing my own thoughts about it, I decided to check out what other readers had said about the novel. While many of the reviews and comments were quite positive, I was shocked at the intensity of some of the more critical or negative ones. Many of these accused the book of being overly simplistic with flat characters, or wrote that the ending was just too good to be true. There was something about these comments that troubled me, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. I found myself going back to comments from teachers who said their students couldn't get enough, and that in fact, many girls read the book over and over. Many young adults had nothing but praise for the book. Where does this leave us as educators when we have such disagreement in the responses and reviews to the book?

I was reminded of a quote I'd recently read in Anna Quindlen's *What I Learned from Reading*-- ". . .in circles devoted to literary criticism, among the professors of literature, the editors and authors of fiction, there was sometimes a kind of horrible exclusivity surrounding discussions of reading. There was good reading, and there was bad reading. There was the worthy, and the trivial. This was always couched in terms of taste, but

it tasted, smelled, and felt unmistakably like snobbery" (p. 11). I have to wonder if this snobbery is at work here. While *Estrella's Quinceañera* didn't move me the way some of the other books we've read this year have, that doesn't mean it isn't worth reading. Teenagers love this book. It resonates with them, and I can see why. Among all of the discussions today about how hard it is to get young adults to read, why wouldn't we promote a book that has been so well received by the very teenagers we're trying to encourage to read? I feel like the things that *Estrella* struggles with are authentic. Having won a scholarship to a prestigious private high school, *Estrella* finds herself in a place quite different from the neighborhood she grew up in. She struggles to decide who she really is, who she wants to be, and what her identity as a Mexican-American teenager means to her. It's a book that is relevant to teenagers today-- *Estrella* argues with her parents, loses friends, has guy troubles, and has to figure out the kind of person she wants to be through the decisions she makes on how to live her life.

As the NPR article points out, it is the quintessential coming of age story, but what sets it apart is that it's written from the point of view of a Mexican-American protagonist, which sets it apart from the majority of other similarly themed novels. I loved how each chapter began with a Spanish/Spanglish word in defined in *Estrella's* own words. Not only does it provide vocabulary or cultural references that will be familiar to many Spanish speaking youth, it will also expose those unfamiliar with the language or culture to new knowledge. It also provides a context that encourages students to predict what might happen in the chapter.

For those who criticize the book for its too good to be true ending, arguing that life never works out that perfectly I'll defer to a quote from Edward Albee that I read in Quindlen's book: "Read the greatest stuff but read the stuff that isn't so great, too. Great stuff is very discouraging. If you read only Beckett and Chekhov, you'll go away and only deliver telegrams at Western Union" (*How Reading Changed My Life*, pg. 51). I couldn't agree more. *Estrella's Quinceañera* is a feel good ending--and sometimes that's exactly what we want and our students need.

Other's thoughts:

[Papertigers](#) writes: "Alegría's book deals with the age-old theme of real friends accepting you for who you are: but adds a modern Latin twist to the story. Girls will love the pop culture references; all the drama via cell phone rings true. In the end, the birthday party *Estrella* puts together on her own has a little something for everyone... just like *Estrella's Quinceañera*."

**LESSON
PLANS**

In addition to the lesson plans and activities included here, check out the link below for more books (both fiction and non-fiction) on quinceañeras:

& ACTIVITIES

- [“When you’re fifteen. . . : A look at quinceañeras in literature”](#) by Jessica DeLeón of The Hispanic Reader.

The following lesson plans are divided into two main categories—History and Social Studies and Literary Interpretation: Guided Reading Questions and Reflective Writing Questions.

- The History and Social Studies section is made up of project-based activities or suggestions that can be used to extend some of the topics covered in the novel.
- The detailed Guided Reading Questions accompany each chapter.
- The Reflective Writing Questions can be used in multiple ways, including as extended response questions, formal essays or individual closing assessments.

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 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.

Social Studies and History

Chicano Social Movements:

Speedy's uncle mentions the Brown Berets and a number of other Chicano social movements. The film *Cointelpro 101* is one way to introduce students to these social movements. From [FreedomArchives.org](http://www.freedomarchives.org): "COINTELPRO 101 is a 56-minute educational film that will open the door to understanding this history. This documentary will introduce viewers new to this history to the basics and direct them to other resources where they can learn more. The intended audiences are the generations that did not experience the social justice movements of the sixties and seventies." A lesson plan has been created to accompany the sections of the film that focus specifically on the Chicano/Mexicano movements. The pdf also includes an indepth list of other resources that may be useful in putting together a unit on this topic. Click [here](#) or follow this link to access the lesson plans:

<http://www.freedomarchives.org/Documents/Curr%20C101/Chicano.Mexicano.pdf>

To extend this activity, once students have been introduced to the various Chicano/Mexicano social movements through the film, assign them individual or group research projects where they will choose a specific movement, event, or person to focus on. Once they have completed their project, they can present their findings to the class.

Cultural Celebrations—La Quinceañera:

Below I've included links to two different lesson plans on teaching about quinceañeras.

- Annette Roberts created a [lesson](#) that compares the quinceañera celebrated in selected Spanish speaking countries, and the coming of age party celebrated in the U.S.A (sweet 16). Students will compare and contrast this social event and will make connections with history and geography via this lesson. While this lesson is based on a reading selection not included in the plans, it could easily be adapted using any of the resources discussed above from The Hispanic Reader's post.
- [Here](#) you'll find a quinceañera project created for a Spanish I class (though it could be easily adapted for a different class). The project includes resources to guide students, easy to follow steps, and a rubric for grading.

**Literary
Interpretation:
Guided Reading
Questions**

Chapter One:

1. What is the definition of a quinceañera? How does Estrella feel about it? (p. 1)
2. Who are Rey and Bobby? (p. 1)
3. Describe Estrella's feelings at Teresa's quinceañera. Hint: Was she really invited? What does Estrella think about how Sheila and Christie would respond to the party?
4. Who is Marta? What happened between her and her family? (p. 6).
5. What is a *dama*? How are they chosen? (p. 8)
6. What happened to Estrella in the past year that seems to have changed her life dramatically? What did it change? (p. 8-9)

Chapter Two:

1. Why does Estrella go by Star at Sacred Heart? (p. 12)
2. How does Estrella feel about her mother meeting her new friends?
3. What happened with Estrella's mother the first week at Sacred Heart? What do you think of how Estrella feels about her mother? Do you understand where she's coming from? Do you think it's disrespectful? Why? (p. 14)
4. How did Estrella meet Christie? (p. 17-18)
5. What two conflicting feelings does Estrella have when she's around Sheila and Christie? (p. 20)

Chapter Three:

1. Compare where Estrella lives on the east side of San José to where Sheila lives in Willow Glenn. How are they different? (p. 25-26)
2. Who does Estrella meet while walking back to her house? Where does she know him from? (p. 27-28)
3. What does Estrella think of the ring her mom gives her for the quinceañera? What other piece of jewelry does she compare it to? (p. 33)

Chapter Four:

1. What assumption does Estrella make about Speedy? Why does she think this? Is she correct? (p. 39-43)
2. How does Speedy justify selling the stolen clothes? What do you think about his argument? (p. 44)

Chapter Five:

1. Who does Estrella first compare Speedy to when describing him for Christie and Sheila? Do they know who this person is? Is this surprising? Why do you think they wouldn't know him? (p. 54)
2. What does Christie do when Estrella says Speedy is from her neighborhood? How do Christie and Sheila respond to the idea of Speedy? Why do you think they react this way? What assumptions are they making about Estrella's neighborhood and the people from there? (p. 53-56)

Chapter Six:

1. What does Estrella promise her father? Do you think she'll keep that promise? (p. 65)
2. What do Estrella's parents argue over at dinner? (p. 67-68)
3. Whose dress is Estrella going to wear for the quinceañera? (p. 68)
4. Marta has been mentioned briefly a few times in the book, what do we know about her? What does the family think about her?

Chapter Seven:

1. Who does Estrella's mom invite to be the damas for the quinceañera? Why is Estrella upset by this? (p. 71-74)
2. How does Grand Master D describe Estrella's quinceañera? Do you think this is appropriate for Estrella? Why or why not? (p. 78)

Chapter Eight:

1. What do Christie, Sheila and Estrella have planned for the afternoon? What happens to change their plans? (p. 83)
2. Describe the conversation between Estrella and her mom in the car? How do you think Estrella made her mom feel? Do you think you've ever said something that made your parents feel the same way? (p. 85-86)

Chapter Nine:

1. Estrella writes, "The only difference was when I was with him, I didn't feel awkward about not knowing something" (p. 90). Why do you think she feels different around Speedy?
2. Why do you think Juana won't let Estrella's family buy the doves that Amy makes? (p. 91-92)

Chapter Ten:

1. Describe Speedy's truck. What did Estrella think of it? Do you think Christie and Sheila would have approved? (p. 94-95)
2. Where does Speedy take Estrella on their date? What advice would

Christie and Sheila have given Estrella on what to eat? Would that have impressed Speedy? How do you know? (p. 97-99)

Chapter Eleven:

1. What happens at the dance rehearsal that forces Tere, Izzy and Estrella into a conversation? What does Estrella find out? (p. 103-106)
2. What does Estrella do at the end of the chapter that surprises everyone? Do you think Estrella is changing? (p. 107)

Chapter Twelve:

1. Who has to take Estrella home from school? How does she feel about this? Why? (p. 110-111).
2. What do Estrella's parents get into an argument about? Describe her mother's point of view then describe her father's point of view. (p.112-113)
3. Where does Estrella take Speedy after the soccer game? Why does she bring him there? (p. 116-118).
4. Who almost catches Estrella with Speedy at El Grullense? What do you think would have happened if she was caught? (p. 122-123)

Chapter Thirteen:

1. What is mal de ojo? (p. 124, 128)
2. Explain the difference between Estrella's mom's and dad's points of view on money. Do you think one is right? (p. 130-131)

Chapter Fourteen:

1. How does Estrella feel when Christie and Sheila criticize the quinceañera? Why do you think she responds this way? (p. 136-138)
2. What do Sheila and Christie give Estrella for her birthday? How does she feel about it? (p. 139-140)
3. Who do you think Estrella is going to call first? (p. 140)

Chapter Fifteen:

1. When Speedy meets Estrella at the park, they start talking about their barrio (or neighborhood). Do they have the same opinion about their barrio? How does Speedy feel? How does Estrella feel? Who would you agree with? (p. 145-147)

Chapter Sixteen:

1. What happens when Estrella tells her father about Speedy? How does he respond? (p. 150-152)
2. How does Estrella treat Speedy when he shows up at school? How do you think that made Speedy feel? Why do you think she acted like that? (p. 153-155)

Chapter Seventeen:

1. What happens when Estrella sees Speedy at the bus stop? What does he say to Estrella? Do you think he's right? (p. 157-159)
2. What is a *vendida*? (p. 156) Who is called a *vendida*? (p. 159)

3. Do you think Izzy was right when she told Estrella “Don’t blame your parents for your actions. Why don’t you ever take any responsibility” (p. 160).

Chapter Eighteen:

1. What happens between Estrella, Christie, and Sheila at the party? (p. p. 171-174)
2. What do you think about what Estrella says to Christie and Sheila? Do you think Estrella has realized something about herself? (p. 171-174)

Chapter Nineteen:

1. Who does Estrella call to help her? (p. 176)
2. What does Estrella find out about her cousin? Is her family’s assessment of Marta correct?

Chapter Twenty:

1. Does Estrella’s grandmother fall for her act? (p. 187-189)
2. What does Estrella learn from Speedy’s uncle? (p. 192-194)

Chapter Twenty-one:

1. Estrella and her parents get into an argument over the quinceañera. What does Estrella say to her parents? How does her mother respond? Why do you think her mother cares so much about the quinceañera? (197-199) What do you think her father meant when he said, “You have no heart” (p. 199)

Chapter Twenty-two:

1. What does Estrella learn from her conversation with Lucky? (p. 204-206)

Chapter Twenty-three:

1. How does Estrella make peace with Izzy? (p. 210-213)

Chapter Twenty-four:

1. How do Tere, Izzy and Estrella plan to pay for the quinceañera? (p. 218-221)
2. What does Estrella realize when she asks Margarita to be her madrina? (p. 222)

Chapter Twenty-five:

1. Who helps raise money for the quinceañera? (p. 224-225)
2. How does Estrella prove to Speedy that she’s changed? (p. 226-227)
3. What happens that eases things between Speedy and Estrella’s father? (p. 232-233)

Chapter Twenty-six:

1. A number of people make amends at the quinceañera. Who all is brought back together? (p. 236, 239, 243)

Chapter Twenty-seven:

**Reflective
Writing
Questions**

1. What do you think Estrella learned through the entire process of planning her quinceañera?
2. What did you think of the ending? Is it what you expected? Would you have ended the book differently?

Writing Questions:

1. Look at each of the words that Alegría defines at the beginning of each chapter. Pick the one that you connect with the most or that means the most to you. Explain why you chose that word.
2. Estrella feels like she has to change who she is to fit in at her new school Sacred Heart. Have you ever felt like you had to change who you were to be accepted? Did you change? If you did, did you feel good about that decision?
3. Estrella changes a great deal over the course of the novel. Describe how she changes. Compare the things that are important to Estrella at the beginning of the book to the things she values at the end. What do you think she's learned?

**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 LAII, **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 1/2013 by Katrina Dillon, LAII Project Assistant.

To complement this guide, the LAII 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>.