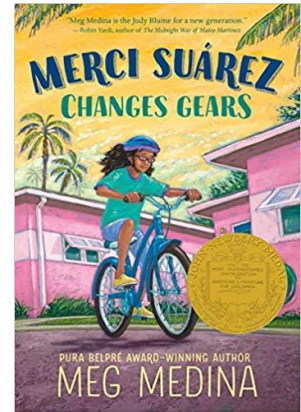


## **Merci Suárez Changes Gears by: Meg Medina** (Candlewick, 2018)



### Who?

In *Merci Suárez Changes Gears*, we first meet **the Suárez family**, who is an extended family that consists of Merci, her older brother and parents, and includes her aunt, two twin cousins, and her grandparents. Everyone lives next door to each other in three neighboring flat-top homes, nicknamed the “pink triplets” or “las casitas.” The family is very tight-knit and eagerly support each other throughout the book.

**Merci (Mercedes) & Roli:** Merci is a 6<sup>th</sup> grader at Seaward Pines Academy—a private school and her older brother, Roli, is a high school senior and science-whiz. Both Merci and Roli are “scholarship students” meaning that instead of paying their school tuition, they are each required to do an additional 20 hours of community service projects around Seaward Pines Academy (on top of the 40 hours required of all students!). Their assigned projects range from working to beautify the school with paint jobs to serving as school ambassadors to help new students acclimate to Seaward Pines. At the start of her 6<sup>th</sup> grade year, Merci is assigned to serve as an ambassador in the school’s Sunshine Buddy program; to her dismay, she is assigned to welcome a new boy to Seaward Pine, which encourages unwanted attention from a school bully.

**Mami & Papi:** are the very involved and loving parents of Merci and Roli. Throughout the book, both Mami and Papi emphasize the importance of education and encourage their children to be grateful and appreciative of the opportunities they have. Both parents are very hardworking to make ends meet and keep their financial struggles and familial issues from their children.

**Abuela & Grandpa Lolo:** are grandparents to Merci, Roli, Tomás and Axel, and parents to Mami and Tía Inés. Merci has a very close relationship with her grandpa and enjoys sharing about her day to him; yet, she’s starting to notice that something is going on with Grandpa Lolo, who is getting forgetful and confused. In some instances when he falls or gets confused, Grandpa Lolo asks Merci to keep it a secret between them so as to not worry Abuela, her parents or her aunt, who are aware of his condition.

**Tía Inés, Tomás & Axel:** Tía Inés is Mami’s sister and thus an aunt to Merci and Roli. Her children are Tomás and Axel, Merci’s twin young cousins, who are infamous for the trouble they get into.

**Edna Santos:** was assigned to be Merci’s Sunshine Buddy last year to welcome her to Seaward. Although Edna is described as a “teacher’s pet” and acts like Merci’s friend, Edna is a bit of a bully to Merci and picks on her for being assigned the Sunshine Buddy of the new boy at Seaward Pines when Edna starts to become interested in him. Edna also has a habit of flaunting her wealth and status as the daughter of a doctor.

**Michael Clark:** is the new boy at Seaward that Merci is assigned to welcome via the Sunshine Buddy program. Michael stands out from the rest of the school as he is very tall and pale, and he is from Minnesota. Merci has a hard time becoming comfortable talking to him because he is a boy and because of how Edna antagonizes her; yet, Michael has no trouble befriending the boys at Seaward Pines Academy.

### Where? When?

*Merci Suárez Changes Gears* begins on Merci’s first day of 6<sup>th</sup> grade at Seaward Pines Academy, a private k-12 school in Southern Florida. The book also takes place in Merci’s home, which is adjacent to the homes of her Tía Inés and her grandparents, and around Merci’s neighborhood.

### What are the key themes throughout the text?

**Use of Foreshadowing:** Although Merci does not know what is going on with her Grandpa Lolo, Medina uses foreshadowing to clue us in that something isn’t alright with Lolo. Ask students to track the examples of foreshadowing that Medina uses and how Merci and her family react to each of these events. This text would serve as a great example to show students how to use foreshadowing in storytelling!

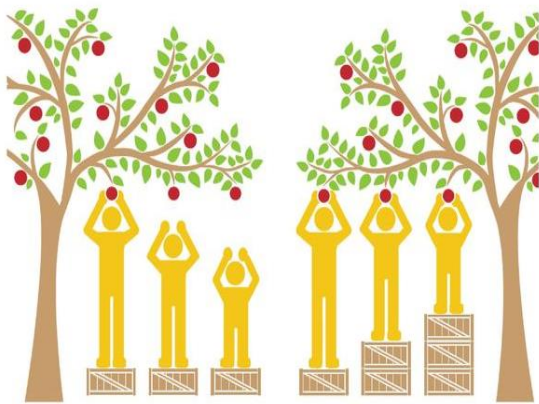
**Being Different & Social Justice Issues in Schools:** Early in the book, we learn that Merci and her brother Roli, are different from the other kids at their private school. Unlike the other kids whose families can afford the tuition, Merci and Roli must complete additional service hours throughout the school year to “work off” their school tuition. This can lead to a couple big idea discussions: (1) the importance and value of a good education and how important education is to Merci’s parents; and, (2) social justice issues in schools and how schools can (*or how they should*) provide additional support for students of a low socioeconomic status.

## Other resources to facilitate the use of *Merci Suárez* in the classroom:

**Talking about privilege and social justice:** *Merci Suárez Changes Gears* provides readers with insight on social justice issues—specifically regarding socioeconomic status and being different. Here are a couple links with resources you can use to get students thinking more about social justice issues and privilege: (1) [http://www.mpsaz.org/mtnview/staff/jwrichardson/economics/unit\\_1/files/resource\\_scarcity\\_game.pdf](http://www.mpsaz.org/mtnview/staff/jwrichardson/economics/unit_1/files/resource_scarcity_game.pdf) & (2) <http://www.socialjusticetoolbox.com/all-activities/>

### Equality vs Equity

The state or quality of being equal



The quality of being fair

EQUALITY doesn't mean EQUITY

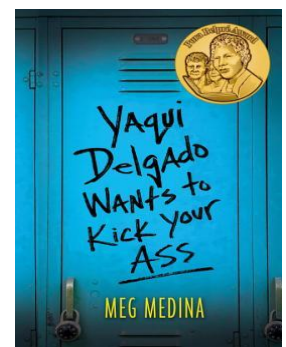


**The first link** is a pdf instructions sheet to the “Resource Scarcity Game” created by Peggy Pride for an AP economics class. This game is quick and highly engaging (as well as accessible to students with limited understanding of economics!) as it forces students to collaborate with their group to accomplish the four tasks that represent essential resources: food, shelter, clothing and education. This pdf also provides options for follow-up activities to continue the discussion on limited resources. This activity can serve as a great opening/introduction to scarcity in resources and social justice issues.

**The second link** is a list of activities designed for students and groups to gain insight into social justice issues. The *Social Justice*

*Toolbox* website and its activities have been curated by Meg Bolger, a passionate social justice facilitator, and the activities are labeled with their estimated time and the level of trust required amongst the group. “Privilege for Sale” and “Create Your Own Privilege List” would be most relevant to the differences in privilege between Merci and her (private school) classmates; however, there are many quick activities that can facilitate discussions on racism, sexuality and more social justice issues!

**More great reads on social justice issues:** If you are interested in continuing the discussion on social justice issues, consider checking out the book sets that the LAll has available. Our recommendations would include: Francisco Jiménez’s *The Circuit* (English version) / *Cajas de cartón* (Spanish version); Nonieqa Ramos’s *The Disturbed Girl’s Dictionary*; Gabby Rivera’s *Juliet Takes a Breath*; Elizabeth Acevedo’s *The Poet X*; Duncan Tonatiuh’s *Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and her Family’s Fight for Desegregation*; and another classic by Meg Medina—*Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*. Submit your check out requests to the LAll and see what else we have available via this link: <https://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.wordpress.com/request-a-book-set/>



If you are interested in a mixed, variety set, check out our Latinx Leaders thematic book set that highlights important activists and figures in Latin America and in the U.S. Submit your check out requests to the LAll and see the other thematic sets we have available here: <https://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.wordpress.com/thematic-book-set-requests/>