English 9
Summer Assignment

Throughout the English 9 course, we will learn to "read like a writer" and develop our own voices in our writing. During the year, we will read a variety of mentor texts that will help us practice and develop analysis skills, as well as understand and emulate examples of effective writing. As we begin the year by reading narrative essays and working to develop our own narrative writing style, we will read a selection of essays that will help us to identify specific writing skills and techniques.

- "Fish Cheeks" by Amy Tan
- "My English" by Julia Alverez
- "Hi. I'm Nic" by Nic Stone
- "Only Daughter" by Sandra Cisneros

As you read each of the works, pay attention to the following questions. There is no formal writing assignment due upon arrival in August, but we will use your notes and answers to these questions as the basis for a writing assignment shortly after you return to school:

1. Notice how the writer uses descriptive language in each of the essays. In what ways does the author utilize sensory imagery (details that relate to the five senses—taste, touch, smell, sight, sound)?
2. Notice the narrative voice. Take note of the language the writer uses. Do they use a lot of slang or formal language? Is their speech filled with emotion or are they more logical and detached? Identify mood and tone.
3. Consider the author's purpose. What is the author trying to communicate to the reader through this piece of writing? What is the moral of the author's story and/or what life lessons can be learned by reading?

COMMONLIT

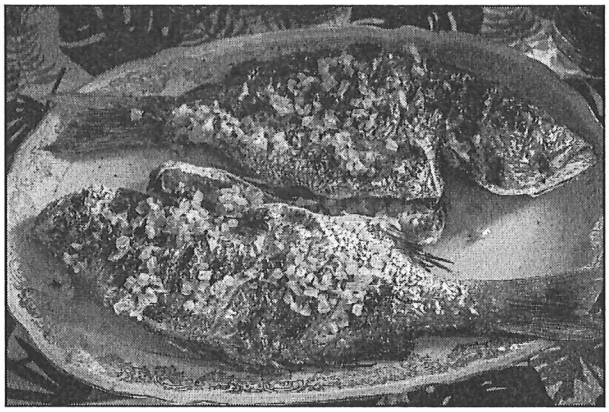
Name: _____ Class: _____

Fish Cheeks

By Amy Tan
1987

Amy Tan is an American writer whose work often provides insight into the experiences of Chinese Americans and family relationships. While her parents emigrated from China, Tan herself was born in Oakland, California. ***Skill Focus:*** *In this lesson, you'll practice analyzing how an author develops a narrator's point of view. This means determining what the narrator thinks or believes and examining how the author uses actions, dialogue, and thoughts to develop this point of view. As you read, take notes on the narrator's point of view of her culture.*

[1] I fell in love with the minister's son the winter I turned fourteen. He was not Chinese, but as white as Mary in the manger.[1] For Christmas I prayed for this blond-haired boy, Robert, and a slim new American nose.



"Untitled" by Jametlene Reskp is licensed under CC0.

When I found out that my parents had invited the minister's family over for Christmas Eve dinner, I cried. What would Robert think of our shabby Chinese Christmas? What would he think of our noisy Chinese relatives who lacked proper American manners? What terrible disappointment would he feel upon seeing not a roasted turkey and sweet potatoes but Chinese food?

On Christmas Eve I saw that my mother had outdone herself in creating a strange menu. She was pulling black veins out of the backs of fleshy prawns.[2] The kitchen was littered with appalling[3] mounds of raw food: A slimy rock cod with bulging eyes that pleaded not to be thrown into a pan of hot oil. Tofu, which looked like stacked wedges of rubbery white sponges. A bowl soaking dried fungus back to life. A plate of squid, their backs crisscrossed with knife markings so they **resembled** bicycle tires.

And then they arrived — the minister's family and all my relatives in a **clamor** of doorbells and rumpled Christmas packages. Robert grunted hello, and I pretended he was not worthy of existence.

[5] Dinner threw me deeper into despair. My relatives licked the ends of their chopsticks and reached across the table, dipping them into the dozen or so plates of food. Robert and his family waited patiently for platters to be passed to them. My relatives murmured with pleasure when my mother brought out the whole steamed fish. Robert **grimaced**. Then my father poked his chopsticks just below the fish eye and plucked out the soft meat. "Amy, your favorite," he said, offering me the tender fish cheek. I wanted to disappear.

1. reference to Jesus's mother, often depicted as white in Europe and North America
2. a common name for shrimp, used particularly in the United Kingdom and Ireland
3. **Appalling** *(adjective)* causing shock, disgust, or alarm

At the end of the meal my father leaned back and belched loudly, thanking my mother for her fine cooking. "It's a polite Chinese custom to show you are satisfied," explained my father to our astonished guests. Robert was looking down at his plate with a reddened face. The minister managed to muster up a quiet burp. I was stunned into silence for the rest of the night.

After everyone had gone, my mother said to me, "You want to be the same as American girls on the outside." She handed me an early gift. It was a miniskirt in beige tweed. "But inside you must always be Chinese. You must be proud you are different. Your only **shame** is to have **shame**."

And even though I didn't agree with her then, I knew that she understood how much I had suffered during the evening's dinner. It wasn't until many years later — long after I had gotten over my crush on Robert — that I was able to fully appreciate her lesson and the true purpose behind our particular menu. For Christmas Eve that year, she had chosen all my favorite foods.

Meet Julia Alvarez

(b. 1950)

Author of *My English*

When her family fled the Dominican Republic and returned to New York, Julia Alvarez was ten years old, and Spanish was her primary language. Painfully aware of not fitting in, Julia took refuge in reading and making up stories. She says, "I landed, not in the United States, but in the English language. That became my new home."

"I write to find out who I am." Alvarez attended Middlebury College, where she won several poetry awards. She later earned a master's degree in creative writing from Syracuse University. Alvarez says that writing is "a way to understand yourself." Her writing has been praised for its humor, sensitivity, and insight.

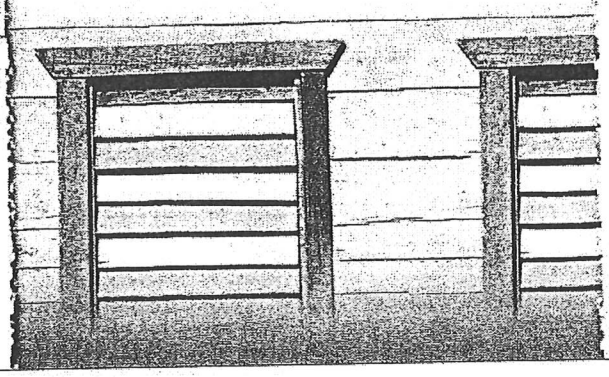
Did You Know?

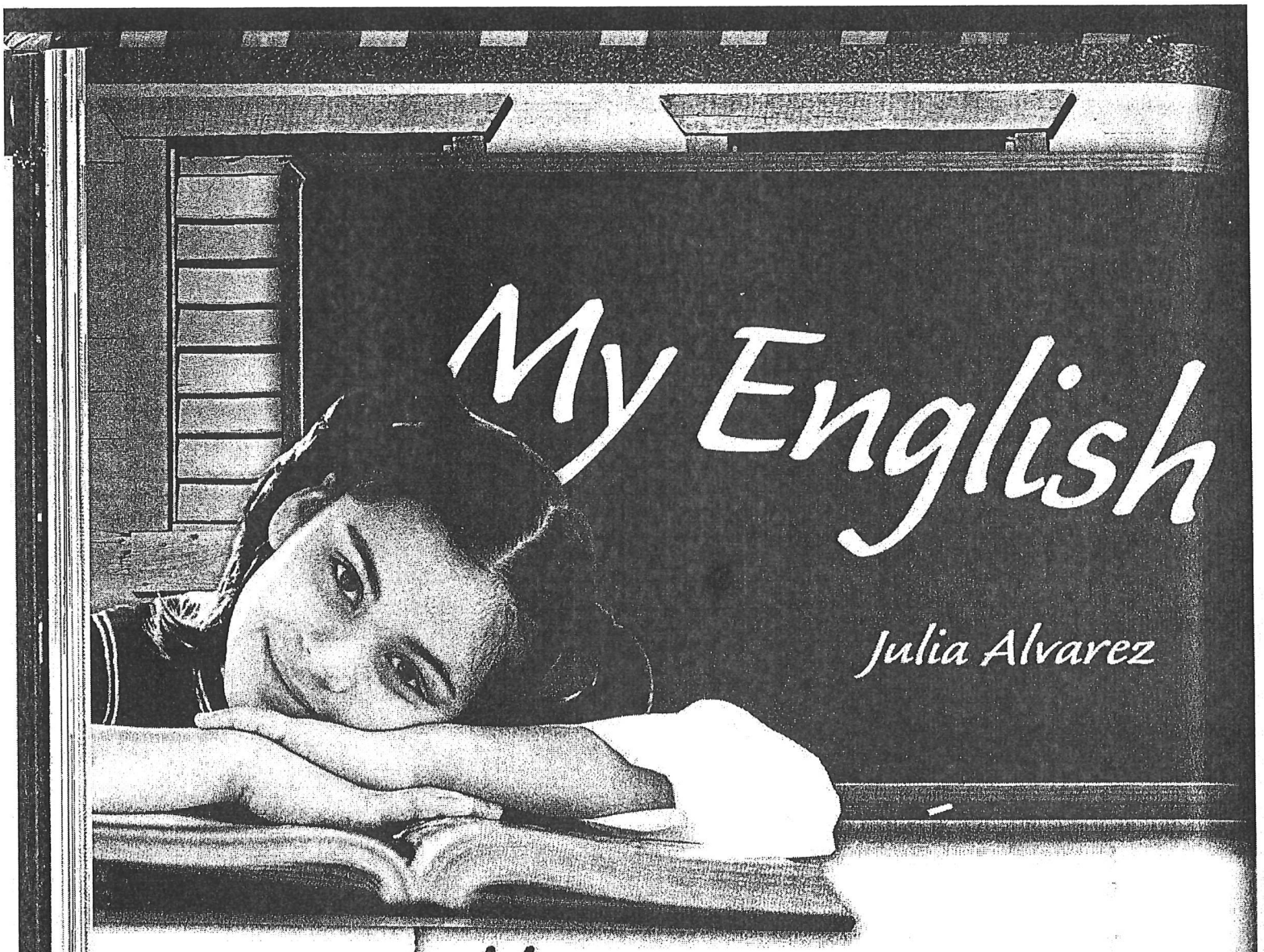
One of Julia Alvarez's books, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, was made into a film starring Salma Hayek.

BACKGROUND FOR THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Alvarez's Two Nationalities

Julia Alvarez, the author of "My English," was born in New York but grew up in the Dominican Republic, a small Caribbean nation. An independent state since 1844, the Dominican Republic has often struggled with foreign conquest, political unrest, and dictatorship. Alvarez's family was forced to return to New York in 1960 because her father had participated in a movement against the brutal Dominican dictator Raphael Trujillo.





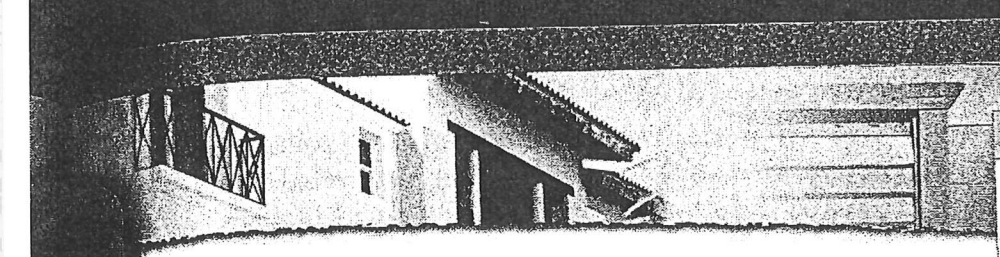
My English

Julia Alvarez

Mami and Papi used to speak it when they had a secret they wanted to keep from us children. We lived then in the Dominican Republic, and the family as a whole spoke only Spanish at home, until my sisters and I started attending the Carol Morgan School, and we became a bilingual family. Spanish had its many tongues as well. There was the castellano[1] of Padre[2] Joaquín from Spain, whose lisp we all loved to imitate. Then the educated español my parents' families spoke, aunts and uncles who were always correcting us children, for we spent most of the day with the maids

Vocabulary
bilingual (bī liŋ′ gwəl) *adj.* using two languages

1. **castellano** (cä′ stā yä′ nō) *Spanish for "Castilian," the most widely spoken dialect of the Spanish language.*
2. **Padre** (pä′ drā) "Father" (Spanish), a form of address for a Roman Catholic priest.



and so had picked up their "bad Spanish." Campesinas,[3] they spoke a lilting, animated campuno,[4] ss swallowed, endings chopped off, funny turns of phrases. This campuno was my true mother tongue, not the Spanish of Calderón de la Barca or Cervantes or even Neruda,[5] but of Chucha and Iluminada and Gladys and Ursulina from Juncalito and Licey and Boca de Yuma and San Juan de la Maguana.[6] Those women yakked as they cooked, they storytold, they gossiped, they sang—boleros, merengues, canciones, salves.[7] Theirs were the voices that belonged to the rain and the wind and the teeny, teeny stars even a small child could blot out with her thumb.

Besides all these versions of Spanish, every once in a while another strange tongue emerged from my papi's mouth or my mami's lips. What I first recognized was not a language, but a tone of voice, serious, urgent, something important and top secret being said, some uncle in trouble, someone divorcing, someone dead. *Say it in English so the children won't understand.* I would listen, straining to understand, thinking that this was not a different language but just another and harder version of Spanish. *Say it in English so the children won't understand.* From the beginning, English was the sound of worry and secrets, the sound of being left out.

I could make no sense of this "harder Spanish," and so I tried by other means to find out what was going on. I knew my mother's face by heart. When the little lines on the corners of her eyes crinkled, she was amused. When her nostrils flared and she bit her lips, she was trying hard not to laugh. She held her head down, eyes glancing up, when she thought I was lying. Whenever she spoke that gibberish English, I translated the general content by watching the Spanish expressions on her face.

LITERATURE IN CONTEXT

Social Studies Connection

The Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic occupies the eastern portion of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the Republic of Haiti. Located about 600 miles southeast of Florida, this area was one of the landing points of Christopher Columbus's first voyage in 1492. The dominant language and culture are Spanish.

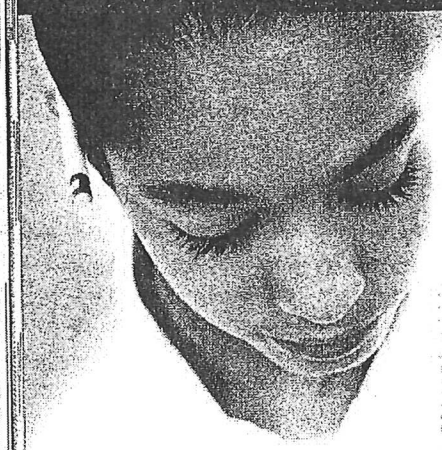
Connect to the Literature

Considering the distance between the Dominican Republic and the United States, why do you think knowing both Spanish and English would be useful?

Reading Check

According to Alvarez, how does English sound?

3. **Campesinas** (käm pā sē′ näs) simple rural women; peasant women (Spanish).
4. **campuno** (käm pōō′ nō) Spanish dialect spoken in rural areas of the Dominican Republic.
5. **Calderón de la Barca** (käl de rôn′ dā lä bär′ kä) . . . **Cervantes** (ser vän′ tes) . . . **Neruda** (nā rōō′ dä) important literary figures.
6. **Juncalito** (hōōŋ cä lē′ tō) . . . **Licey** . . . **Boca de Yuma** (bō′ cä dā yōō′ mä) . . . **San Juan de la Maguana** (sän hwän′ dā lä mä gwä′ nä) small rural villages in the Dominican Republic.
7. **boleros** (bō ler′ ōs) . . . **merengues** (mə reŋ′ gās) . . . **canciones** (cän sē ō′ nes) . . . **salves** (säl′ ves) Spanish and Latin American songs and dances.



Soon, I began to learn more English, at the Carol Morgan School. That is, when I had stopped gawking. The teacher and some of the American children had the strangest coloration: light hair, light eyes, light skin, as if Ursulina had soaked them in bleach too long, to' deteñío.[8] I did have some blond cousins, but they had deeply tanned skin, and as they grew older, their hair darkened, so their earlier paleness seemed a phase of their acquiring normal color. Just as strange was the little girl in my reader who had a *cat* and a *dog*, that looked just like un gatito y un perrito. Her mami was *Mother* and her papi *Father*. Why have a whole new language for school and for books with a teacher who could speak it teaching you double the amount of words you really needed?

Butter, butter, butter, butter. All day, one English word that had particularly struck me would go round and round in my mouth and weave through all the Spanish in my head until by the end of the day, the word did sound like just another Spanish word. And so I would say, "Mami, please pass la mantequilla." She would scowl and say in English, "I'm sorry, I don't understand. But would you be needing some butter on your bread?"

Literary Analysis Voice Which words and phrases here convey the writer's uncertainty about English and her unwillingness to learn it?

Spiral Review Central Idea What central idea does Alvarez convey here?

Why my parents didn't first educate us in our native language by enrolling us in a Dominican school, I don't know. Part of it was that Mami's family had a tradition of sending the boys to the States to boarding school and college, and she had been one of the first girls to be allowed to join her brothers. At Abbot Academy,[9] whose school song was our lullaby as babies ("Although Columbus and Cabot[10] never heard of Abbot, it's quite the place for you and me"), she had become quite Americanized. It was very important, she kept saying, that we learn our English. She always used the possessive pronoun: *your* English, an inheritance we had come into and must wisely use. Unfortunately, my English became all mixed up with our Spanish.

Mix-up, or what's now called Spanglish, was the language we spoke for several years. There wasn't a sentence that wasn't colonized by an English word. At school, a Spanish word would suddenly slide into my English like someone butting into line. Teacher, whose face I was learning to read as minutely as my mother's, would scowl but no smile played on her lips. Her pale skin made her strange countenance hard to read, so that I often misjudged how much I could get away with. Whenever I made a

Vocabulary countenance (kount´ tə nəns) *n.* face

8. **to' deteñío** (tō dā tān yē´ ō) all washed out; completely colorless (Spanish).
9. **Abbot Academy** boarding school for girls in Andover, Massachusetts; merged in 1973 with the neighboring boys' school, Phillips Academy.
10. **Cabot** (kab´ ət) John Cabot (1450–1499), Italian explorer who sailed in the service of England and was the first European to discover the coast of North America in 1497.

mistake, Teacher would shake her head slowly, "In English, YU-LEE-AH, there's no such word as *columpio.* Do you mean a *swing?*"

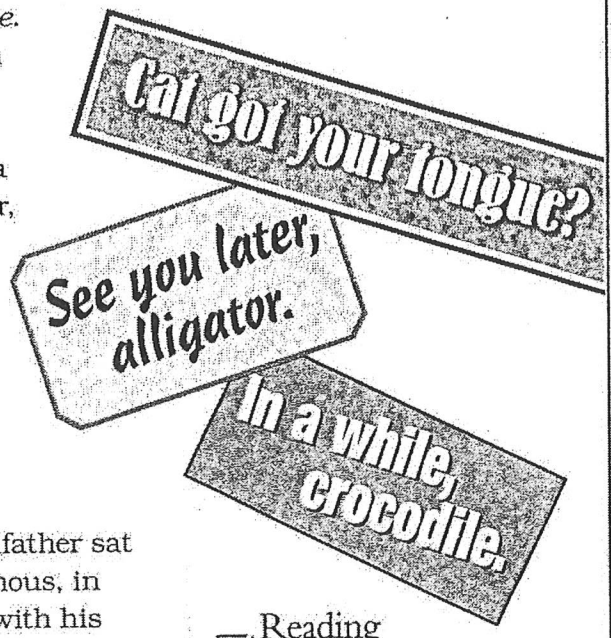
I would bow my head, humiliated by the smiles and snickers of the American children around me. I grew insecure about Spanish. My native tongue was not quite as good as English, as if words like *columpio* were illegal immigrants trying to cross a border into another language. But Teacher's discerning grammar-and-vocabulary-patrol ears could tell and send them back.

Literary Analysis Voice
How would you describe the author's voice, based on her examples of idiomatic expressions?

Soon, I was talking up an English storm. "Did you eat English parrot?" my grandfather asked one Sunday. I had just enlisted yet one more patient servant to listen to my rendition of "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers" at breakneck pace. "Huh?" I asked impolitely in English, putting him in his place. *Cat got your tongue? No big deal! So there! Take that! Holy Toledo!* (Our teacher's favorite "curse word.") *Go jump in the lake! Really dumb. Golly. Gosh.* Slang, clichés, sayings, hotshot language that our teacher called, ponderously, idiomatic expressions. Riddles, jokes, puns, conundrums. *What is yellow and goes click-click? Why did the chicken cross the road? See you later, alligator.* How wonderful to call someone an alligator and not be scolded for being disrespectful. In fact, they were supposed to say back, *In a while, crocodile.*

Vocabulary
ponderously (pän' dər əs lē) *adv.* in a labored, boring, and serious way

There was also a neat little trick I wanted to try on an English-speaking adult at home. I had learned it from Elizabeth, my smart-alecky friend in fourth grade, whom I alternately worshiped and resented. I'd ask her a question that required an explanation, and she'd answer, "Because . . ." "Elizabeth, how come you didn't go to Isabel's birthday party?" "Because . . ." "Why didn't you put your name in your reader?" "Because . . ." I thought that such a cool way to get around having to come up with answers. So, I practiced saying it under my breath, planning for the day I could use it on an unsuspecting English-speaking adult.



One Sunday at our extended family dinner, my grandfather sat down at the children's table to chat with us. He was famous, in fact, for the way he could carry on adult conversations with his grandchildren. He often spoke to us in English so that we could practice speaking it outside the classroom. He was a Cornell[11] man, a United Nations representative from our country. He gave speeches in English. Perfect English, my mother's phrase. That

Reading Check
Which language did Alvarez learn to speak first—English or Spanish?

11. **Cornell** Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

Sunday, he asked me a question. I can't even remember what it was because I wasn't really listening but lying in wait for my chance. "Because . . .," I answered him. Papito waited a second for the rest of my sentence and then gave me a thumbnail grammar lesson, "*Because* has to be followed by a clause."

"Why's that?" I asked, nonplussed.[12]

"Because," he winked. "Just because."

A beginning wordsmith, I had so much left to learn; sometimes it was disheartening. Once Tío[13] Gus, the family intellectual, put a speck of salt on my grandparents' big dining table during Sunday dinner. He said, "Imagine this whole table is the human brain. Then this teensy grain is all we ever use of our intelligence!" He enumerated geniuses who had perhaps used two grains, maybe three: Einstein, Michelangelo, da Vinci, Beethoven. We children believed him. It was the kind of impossible fact we thrived on, proving as it did that the world out there was not drastically different from the one we were making up in our heads.

Vocabulary
enumerated
(ē nōō′ mər āt id) *v.* named one by one; specified, as in a list

Later, at home, Mami said that you had to take what her younger brother said "with a grain of salt." I thought she was still referring to Tío Gus's demonstration, and I tried to puzzle out what she was saying. Finally, I asked what she meant. "Taking what someone says with a grain of salt is an idiomatic expression in English," she explained. It was pure voodoo is what it was—what later I learned poetry could also do: a grain of salt could symbolize both the human brain and a condiment for human nonsense. And it could be itself, too: a grain of salt to flavor a bland plate of American food.

Reading Skill
Author's Purpose
Why do you think the writer includes these details about Mami's comments?

"Taking what someone says **with a grain of salt** *is an idiomatic expression in English," she explained.*

When we arrived in New York, I was shocked. A country where everyone spoke English! These people must be smarter, I thought. Maids, waiters, taxi drivers, doormen, bums on the street, all spoke this difficult language. It took some time before I understood that Americans were not necessarily a smarter, superior race. It was as natural for them to learn their mother tongue as it was for a little Dominican baby to learn Spanish. It came with "mother's milk," my mother explained, and for a while I thought a mother tongue was a mother tongue because you got it from your mother's milk along with proteins and vitamins.

Soon it wasn't so strange that everyone was speaking in English instead of Spanish. I learned not to hear it as English, but as sense. I no longer strained to understand, I understood. I relaxed in this second language. Only when someone with a heavy southern or

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12. nonplussed (nän plüst′) *v.* confused; baffled.
13. Tío (tē′ ō) "Uncle" (Spanish).

British accent spoke in a movie, or at church when the priest droned his sermon—only then did I experience that little catch of anxiety. I worried that I would not be able to understand, that I wouldn't be able to "keep up" with the voice speaking in this acquired language. I would be like those people from the Bible we had studied in religion class, whom I imagined standing at the foot of an enormous tower[14] that looked just like the skyscrapers around me. They had been punished for their pride by being made to speak different languages so that they didn't understand what anyone was saying.

But at the foot of those towering New York skyscrapers, I began to understand more and more—not less and less—English. In sixth grade, I had one of the first in a lucky line of great English teachers who began to nurture in me a love of language, a love that had been there since my childhood of listening closely to words. Sister Maria Generosa did not make our class interminably diagram sentences from a workbook or learn a catechism[15] of grammar rules. Instead, she asked us to write little stories imagining we were snowflakes, birds, pianos, a stone in the pavement, a star in the sky. What would it feel like to be a flower with roots in the ground? If the clouds could talk, what would they say? She had an expressive, dreamy look that was accentuated by the wimple[16] that framed her face.

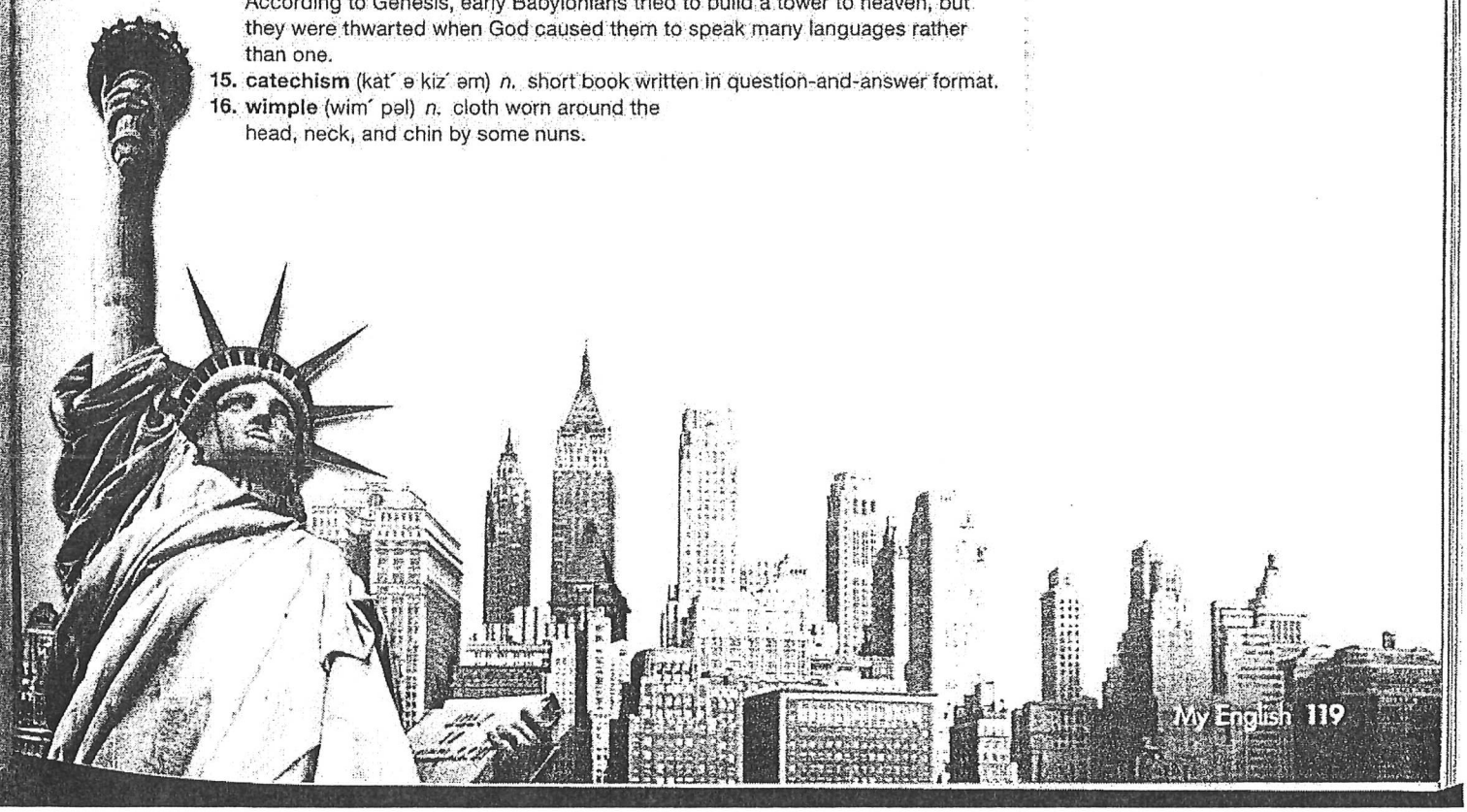
Supposing, just supposing . . . My mind would take off, soaring into possibilities, a flower with roots, a star in the sky, a cloud full of sad, sad tears, a piano crying out each time its back was tapped, music only to our ears.

▼ Critical Viewing
Based on these photographs, why do you think Alvarez might have found New York to be both intimidating and exciting? **[Analyze]**

Vocabulary
interminably (in tʉr′ mi nə blē) *adv.* endlessly
accentuated (ak sen′ chōō āt id) *v.* emphasized; heightened the effect of

Reading Check
To what city does Alvarez's family relocate?

14. **enormous tower** a reference to the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1–9. According to Genesis, early Babylonians tried to build a tower to heaven, but they were thwarted when God caused them to speak many languages rather than one.
15. **catechism** (kat′ ə kiz′ əm) *n.* short book written in question-and-answer format.
16. **wimple** (wim′ pəl) *n.* cloth worn around the head, neck, and chin by some nuns.



Literary Analysis
Voice
Which words and phrases in these paragraphs give the author's voice a poetic quality?

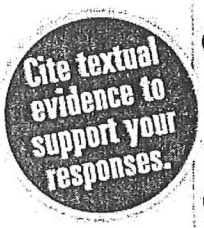
Sister Maria stood at the chalkboard. Her chalk was always snapping in two because she wrote with such energy, her whole habit[17] shaking with the swing of her arm, her hand tap-tap-tapping on the board. "Here's a simple sentence: 'The snow fell.'" Sister pointed with her chalk, her eyebrows lifted, her wimple poked up. Sometimes I could see wisps of gray hair that strayed from under her headdress. "But watch what happens if we put an adverb at the beginning and a prepositional phrase at the end: 'Gently, the snow fell on the bare hills.'"

I thought about the snow. I saw how it might fall on the hills, tapping lightly on the bare branches of trees. Softly, it would fall on the cold, bare fields. On toys children had left out in the yard, and on cars and on little birds and on people out late walking on the streets. Sister Marie filled the chalkboard with snowy print, on and on, handling and shaping and moving the language, scribbling all over the board until English, those verbal gadgets, those tricks and turns of phrases, those little fixed units and counters, became a charged, fluid mass that carried me in its great fluent waves, rolling and moving onward, to deposit me on the shores of my new homeland. I was no longer a foreigner with no ground to stand on. I had landed in the English language.

I was no longer a foreigner with no ground to stand on. I had landed in the English language.

17. **habit** (hab' it) *n.* robe or dress worn by some nuns.

1. **Key Ideas and Details (a)** When Julia Alvarez was young, at what times did her parents speak English at home? **(b) Infer:** Why do you think Alvarez says that English was the "sound of being left out"?
2. **Key Ideas and Details (a)** What method does Sister Maria Generosa use to teach Alvarez English? **(b) Compare and Contrast:** How does this method differ from the way she was taught at the Carol Morgan School? **(c) Assess:** Which method does Alvarez prefer? Why?
3. **Craft and Structure Evaluate:** How well do you think Alvarez succeeds in portraying the growth of her relationship with the English language? Use details from the text to support your answer.
4. **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas** How do Alvarez's ideas about English change as she learns the language? *[Connect to the Big Question: Can truth change?]*



COMMONLIT

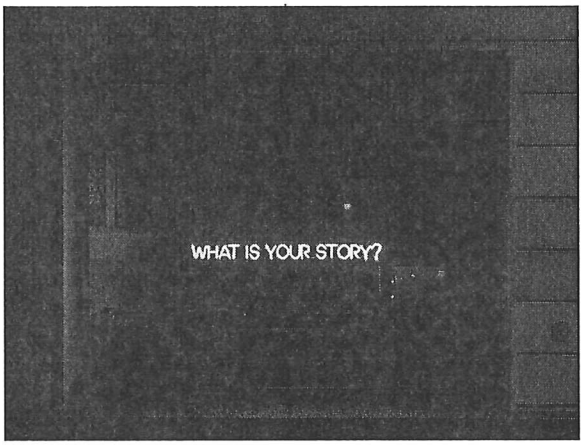
Name: _____ Class: _____

Hi. I'm Nic

By Nic Stone
2017

Nic Stone is an American young adult fiction writer and author of Dear Martin, *a New York Times Bestseller. Prior to her writing career, Stone spent several years living in Israel. Israel and Palestine have been at the center of an international issue known as the Israeli-Palestininan Conflict. Both Israelis and Palestininans lay claim to the same area, and the conflict has resulted in violence between them that has spanned many years. As you read, take notes on how the author's perspective on stories changes over the course of the text.*

[1] It didn't occur to me that I could be a writer until the summer I turned twenty-three. By then, I was a two-time college dropout who'd hopped a plane to Israel with all of forty dollars in my pocket, hoping to find a remedy for an eleven-year identity crisis among the ruins of the Bible's holiest city.[1] I'd tried on a variety of metaphorical shoes at that point — undergraduate psychology major, retail store manager, personal assistant, youth group leader, fitness trainer, model, teen mentor, aspiring singer, seminary[2] student — and had yet to find a pair that really fit.



"»What is your story?«" by Etienne Girardet is licensed under CC0.

I had the same nose-perpetually-buried-in-a-book childhood as most aspiring writers, but once I hit adolescence, reading lost its savor for me. In fifth grade, I tested into the gifted program and became the only Black girl in my school's microcosm[3] of academic high achievers. This wasn't really a big deal until a couple of years later when peer acceptance became the Holy Grail and I discovered that my African-American peers were suspicious of me because I spent the majority of my time in school with white kids.

Around this same time, the books assigned to us in Gifted Language Arts became more literary in nature. Gone were the days of *Mrs. Piggle Wiggle, Encyclopedia Brown,*[4] and anything and everything written by Roald Dahl and Judy Blume. *The Giver* and *Animal Farm*, *The Odyssey*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Fahrenheit 451*[5] were the books we were to read and dissect[6] for theme and symbolism.

1. likely Jerusalem, an ancient city important to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism
2. education needed in order to become a priest, minister, or rabbi
3. Microcosm (noun) : a small community
4. examples of chapter book series for children
5. common texts that are taught in English Language Arts classes in the United States
6. Dissect (verb) : to break down something in order to examine and interpret what it means

Frankly, back then I didn't really connect with any of the books we were required to read, and as a result, they added to my sense of isolation. While I could appreciate the beauty of the English language and the way the authors laced words together, I struggled to engage in the actual stories because I could never seem to identify with the characters. As a matter of fact, studying books like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Of Mice and Men* — books whose only characters of color were either escaped slaves or intellectual incompetents[7] — while sitting in a classroom where I was the sole African American made for a very uncomfortable experience. I didn't see myself in the books we were assigned, so no one else saw me either. Reading, which at one point had been this epic foray[8] into magic and mystery and faraway places, became nothing more than another piece of drudgery to check off my homework list.

[5] It wasn't until the summer I turned twenty-three and hopped on that plane to Israel that I began to get a real grasp on the role of Story in the human experience. I spent that summer stepping into other people's shoes. There were the shoes of a Palestinian Christian girl living in the West Bank who wasn't allowed into Israel proper without a permit, but faced insane amounts of harassment[9] in her neighborhood because of her family's chosen faith. There were the shoes of the Israeli soldier who'd been trained to view all Arabs as potential threats, but was so sickened by it he couldn't wait to get out of the army[10] so he could leave the country. There were the small shoes of the children in the Palestinian refugee camps training to be martyrs for Allah[11] because they felt it was their call in life. There were the shoes of the Orthodox Jewish[12] man whose entire family had been murdered in his home by Palestinian militants[13] while they slept.

As I listened to these stories and made an attempt at empathy — putting myself in their proverbial[14] shoe — my perspectives shifted. Life became less about right and wrong, good and bad, black and white, and more about complexity and nuance,[15] the power of the human being to bring either calm or chaos into the lives of others and the world around them. Storytelling revealed itself as a means of getting people to listen without interrupting. Done well, it engages listeners/readers to the point where they're completely oblivious[16] to the shifts in worldview taking place as a result of stepping into a different perspective.

The stories I heard over that summer, like my own, were the ones I hadn't encountered in my Language Arts classes. And they shook me. They changed the way I approach people with beliefs that differ from my own. They changed the way I voice my opinions. In a way, they cleaned the lens through which I view the world.

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7. a person who is ignorant through lack of education or disability
8. Foray (noun) : an initial and often cautious attempt to do something in a new or different field or area of activity
9. Harassment (noun) : to create an unpleasant or hostile situation, especially through uninvited and unwelcome behavior
10. Israel requires all citizens over the age of eighteen to serve in the military, with some exceptions. As of 2015, women must serve two years, men two years and eight months.
11. A person who is killed because of their religious beliefs. In Islam, who is considered a martyr can extend beyond this definition to include others depending on context.
12. Orthodox Judaism is a broad term for more traditional branches of modern Judaism. Generally, Orthodox Jews strictly observe the teachings of the Torah and Talmud and apply it to their daily lives.
13. a person engaged in warfare or combat
14. of or relating to a common saying
15. Nuance (noun) : small distinctions and differences between things
16. Oblivious (adjective) : lacking awareness or knowledge of something happening

I discovered that once I put on all those different pairs of shoes, I wanted to share those shoes and their impact with others. I wanted to tell the stories that weren't being told, the ones featuring diverse characters in non-stereotypical roles, the ones that blurred the line between "right" and "wrong", the ones that reveal the humanity in those who are underrepresented or misunderstood. Since that summer I turned 23, I've reread most of the books that I was unable to connect with as a teen, and I'm happy to report that I quite enjoy them now that I've found the shoes for myself. The answer to my identity crisis was simple: I am a storyteller.

Now get those shoes off so I can give you a different pair to try on.

Only Daughter
Sandra Cisneros

from *Latina: Women's Voices From the Borderlands.* Edited by Lillian Castillo-Speed. New York: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1995.

Once, several years ago, when I was just starting out my writing career, I was asked to write my own contributor's note for an anthology[1] I was part of. I wrote: "I am the only daughter in a family of six sons. *That* explains everything."

Well, I've thought about that ever since, and yes, it explains a lot to me, but for the reader's sake I should have written: "I am the only daughter in a *Mexican* family of six sons." Or even: "I am the only daughter of a Mexican father and a Mexican-American mother." Or: "I am the only daughter of a working-class family of nine." All of these had everything to do with who I am today.

I was/am the only daughter and *only* a daughter. Being an only daughter in a family of six sons forced me by circumstance to spend a lot of time by myself because my brothers felt it beneath them to play with a *girl* in public. But that aloneness, that loneliness, was good for a would-be writer—it allowed me time to think and think, to imagine, to read and prepare myself.

Being only a daughter for my father meant my destiny would lead me to become someone's wife. That's what he believed. But when I was in the fifth grade and shared my plans for college with him, I was sure he understood. I remember my father saying, "*Que bueno, mi'ha,* that's good." That meant a lot to me, especially since my brothers thought the idea hilarious. What I didn't realize was that my father thought college was good for girls—good for finding a husband. After four years in college and two more in graduate school, and still no husband, my father shakes his head even now and says I wasted all that education.

In retrospect[2], I'm lucky my father believed daughters were meant for husbands. It meant it didn't matter if I majored in something silly like English. After all, I'd find a nice professional eventually, right? This allowed me the liberty to putter about embroidering[3] my little poems and stories without my father interrupting with so much as a "What's that you're writing?"

But the truth is, I wanted him to interrupt. I wanted my father to understand what it was I was scribbling, to introduce me as "My only daughter, the writer." Not as "This is only my daughter. She teaches." *Es maestra*—teacher. Not even *profesora.*

In a sense, everything I have ever written has been for him, to win his approval even though I know my father can't read English words, even though my father's only reading includes the brown-ink *Esto* sports magazines from Mexico City and the bloody *¡Alarma!* magazines that feature yet another sighting of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* on a tortilla or a wife's revenge on her philandering husband by bashing his skull in with a *molcajete* (a kitchen mortar[4] made of volcanic rock). Or the *fotonovelas,* the little picture paperbacks with tragedy and trauma erupting from the characters' mouths in bubbles.

My father represents, then, the public majority. A public who is disinterested in reading, and yet one whom I am writing about and for, and privately trying to woo[5].

When we were growing up in Chicago, we moved a lot because of my father. He suffered bouts of nostalgia[6]. Then we'd have to let go of our flat[7], store the furniture with mother's relatives, load the station wagon with baggage and bologna sandwiches and head south. To Mexico City.

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[1] **anthology:** collection of stories and other literature in a book.

[2] **retrospect:** thinking about things in the past

[3] **embroidering:** adding details to

[4] **mortar:** a very hard bowl in which things are ground into a fine powder

[5] **woo:** attract, interest

[6] **bouts of nostalgia:** short periods of time with homesickness

[7] **flat:** apartment

We came back, of course. To yet another Chicago flat, another Chicago neighborhood, another Catholic school. Each time, my father would seek out the parish priest in order to get a tuition break[8], and complain or boast: "I have seven sons."

He meant *siete hijos,* seven children, but he translated it as "sons." "I have seven sons." To anyone who would listen. The Sears Roebuck employee who sold us the washing machine. The short-order cook where my father ate his ham-and-eggs breakfasts. "I have seven sons." As if he deserved a medal from the state.

My papa. He didn't mean anything by that mistranslation, I'm sure. But somehow I could feel myself being erased. I'd tug my father's sleeve and whisper: "Not seven sons. Six! and *one daughter.*"

When my oldest brother graduated from medical school, he fulfilled my father's dream that we study hard and use this—our heads, instead of this—our hands. Even now my father's hands are thick and yellow, stubbed by a history of hammer and nails and twine and coils[9] and springs. "Use this," my father said, tapping his head, "and not this," showing us those hands. He always looked tired when he said it.

Wasn't college an investment? And hadn't I spent all those years in college? And if I didn't marry, what was it all for? Why would anyone go to college and then choose to be poor? Especially someone who had always been poor.

Last year, after ten years of writing professionally, the financial rewards[10] started to trickle in. My second National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. A guest professorship at the University of California, Berkeley. My book, which sold to a major New York publishing house.

At Christmas, I flew home to Chicago. The house was throbbing[11], same as always: hot tamales and sweet tamales hissing in my mother's pressure cooker, and everybody—my mother, six brothers, wives, babies, aunts, cousins—talking too loud and at the same time. Like in a Fellini[12] film, because that's just how we are.

I went upstairs to my father's room. One of my stories had just been translated into Spanish and published in an anthology of Chicano[13] writing and I wanted to show it to him. Ever since he recovered from a stroke two years ago, my father likes to spend his leisure hours horizontally[14]. And that's how I found him, watching a Pedro Infante movie on Galavisión and eating rice pudding.

There was a glass filled with milk on the bedside table. There were several vials of pills and balled Kleenex. And on the floor, one black sock and a plastic urinal that I didn't want to look at but looked at anyway. Pedro Infante was about to burst into song, and my father was laughing.

I'm not sure if it was because my story was translated into Spanish, or because it was published in Mexico, or perhaps because the story dealt with Tepeyac, the *colonia* my father was raised in and the house he grew up in, but at any rate, my father punched the mute button on his remote control and read my story.

I sat on the bed next to my father and waited. He read it very slowly. As if he were reading each line over and over. He laughed at all the right places and read lines he liked out loud. He pointed and asked questions: "Is this So-and-so?" "Yes," I said. He kept reading.

When he was finally finished, after what seemed like hours, my father looked up and asked: "Where can we get more copies of this for the relatives?"

Of all the wonderful things that happened to me last year, that was the most wonderful.

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[8] **tuition break:** a decrease in the cost of going to a private school

[9] **twines and coils:** strings and loops

[10] **financial rewards:** money

[11] **throbbing:** beating

[12] **Fellini:** an Italian movie director

[13] **Chicano:** Mexican-American

[14] **horizontally:** laying down