

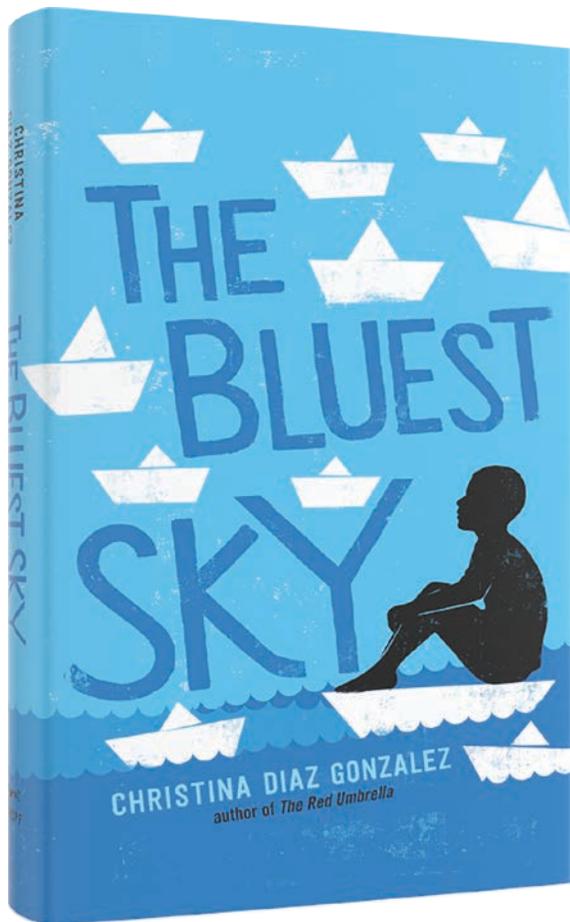
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CHRISTINA DIAZ GONZALEZ
author of *The Red Umbrella*

EDUCATOR GUIDE
RHTeachersLibrarians.com

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Themes: Immigrant Experience, Hispanic/Hispanic American Interest, Historical Fiction, Family & Relationships, Making Choices

ABOUT THE BOOK

There are two versions of Héctor: the public and the private. It's the only way to survive in communist Cuba—especially when your father was exiled to the U.S. and labeled an enemy of the people. Héctor must always be seen as a fierce supporter of the regime, even if that means loudly rejecting the father he still loves.

But in the summer of 1980, those two versions are hard to keep separate. No longer able to suppress a public uprising, the Cuban government says it will open the port of Mariel to all who wish to leave the country—if they can find a boat. But choosing to leave comes with a price. Those who want to flee are denounced as traitors by family and friends. There are violent acts of repudiation, and no one knows if they will truly be allowed to leave the country or not.

So when Héctor's mother announces that she wants the family to risk everything to go to the United States, he is torn. He misses his father, but Cuba is the only home he has ever known. All his dreams and plans require him to stay. Can he leave everything behind for an unknown future?

In a summer of heat and upheaval, danger and deadly consequences, Héctor's two worlds are on a collision course. Will the impact destroy him and everything he loves?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christina Diaz Gonzalez is the award-winning author of several books, including *The Red Umbrella*, *A Thunderous Whisper*, *Moving Target*, *Return Fire*, *Concealed*, and *Invisible*. Her books have received numerous honors, including the American Library Association's Best Fiction for Young Adults, the Florida Book Award, the Nebraska Book Award, and the International Latino Book Award. Christina currently lives in Miami, Florida, with her husband, sons, and a dog that can open doors.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

As background information, show students the following video:

[The Mariel Boatlift | Inside the Museum - YouTube](#). Ask students to write a paragraph explaining their reaction to the information presented in the video. Students can then share their paragraphs with the class.



THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Discussion Questions

Family Relationships

1. How does Héctor's family show love and respect to one another?
2. How does Héctor's father's prison sentence and exile to Miami affect the family?
3. Explain the relationship between Héctor and Rodrigo.
4. How do Rodrigo and Héctor react to their mother's plan to leave Cuba?
5. Why is their mother willing to risk everything to flee Cuba?
6. What influence does Abuela have in the country?
7. How does Abuela try to stop her daughter and grandsons from leaving Cuba?
8. As the family leaves Cuba, why is their vow to stay together broken?

Friendship

1. Héctor is friends with all of Teo's relatives, and they consider Héctor a part of their family. How are Héctor and Teo like brothers? Why is claiming brotherhood so important to them?
2. What role does Isabel play in their relationship?
3. How does Héctor's family's plans to leave Cuba affect the friendship, both between the boys and their families?
4. How does Teo's death alter the relationship between the families?
5. How are the families reunited?

Identity

1. Héctor and his family must live two lives. On page 6, Héctor says, "There is what we believed in private and what we said in public. Two versions of who we were." On page 35, Héctor's mom says, "Sometimes pretending to be someone else can make you forget who you really are." How does living two lives affect Héctor's family? How does this affect Héctor's relationship with Teo and Isabel?
2. How does leaving Cuba affect Héctor's identity?

Overcoming Challenges

1. Using specific details from the book, ask students to examine the personal challenges the major characters must overcome. How do the individual characters differ in the way they handle the problems before them? How do the characters' challenges change from the beginning of the story to the end?

CONNECTING TO THE CURRICULUM

History

Ask students to investigate the Mariel boatlift. Have students work in small groups to research and explain the following:

1. What was it and how long did it last?
2. What were the causes of the exodus of Cuban citizens? What documents were Cuban citizens required to have to leave the country?
3. What types of boats were used, and who helped the refugees arrive safely in Florida?
4. Where did the refugees live and who made those decisions?

Have each group of students use their research to write and present interviews with individuals impacted by the Mariel boatlift. Encourage students to focus on personal circumstances of each in order to personalize the interviews. Each group should practice and present their interviews to the class.

English/Language Arts

Divide students into four groups; two groups will assume the voice of the Cuban government, and two groups will assume the voices of the people who wanted to flee the country. Using research and insights from the book, each group will make a list of reasons to support their argument. Students can then debate the issues that were facing the citizens of Cuba at the time.

Ask students to analyze one of the main characters. Students should include why the character is important to the story, two important events in which the character played a role, personal information about the character, and two quotes that represent the character's life. Students should use a graphic organizer to compile their information, and then write a character analysis to share with the class.

Social Studies

Ask students to discuss the impact of 125,000 Cubans coming to Florida in a seven-month time frame. Students should consider how this influx affected housing, food, the economy, social services, and the workforce. Also consider the trauma experienced and how that would have affected the situation. Then, with a partner, have students create a T-chart listing potential issues that might arise on the left side of the chart and how Americans handled the influx of people on the right. Have students make a second T-chart with a list of the issues the Cuban people faced on the left and how they coped with the changes in their lives on the right. Ask each student to select one issue from either chart and write a one-page personal essay about the issue. Have students pair and share their papers.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Immigration History

[Mariel Boatlift of 1980 - Immigration History](#)

Historical Account

[The Mariel Boatlift: How Cold War Politics Drove Thousands of Cubans to Florida in 1980 - HISTORY](#)

Video Images of Refugees

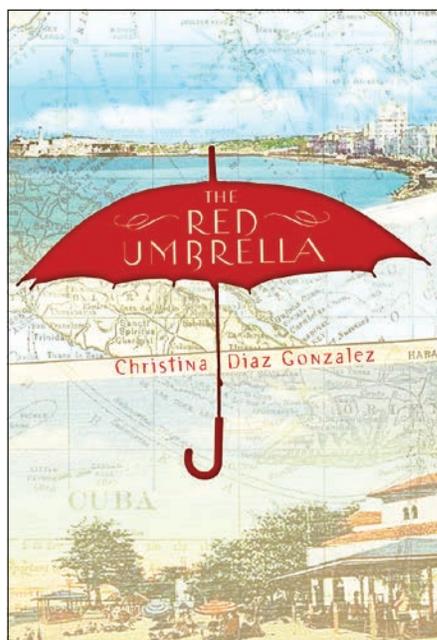
[CUBA MARIEL BOAT LIFT 1980 - YouTube](#)

Immigrant Impact on Labor

[The Mariel Boatlift: Immigration's Impact on Local Workers - YouTube](#)

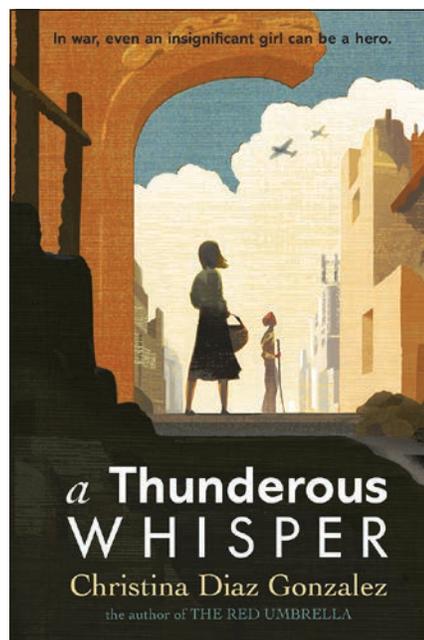
ALSO BY CHRISTINA DIAZ GONZALEZ

TR: 978-0-375-85489-7 • EL: 978-0-375-89628-6



“Based on the author’s parent’s story, Gonzalez’s first novel captures the heart-wrenching, personal drama of family separation.”
—*Booklist*

TR: 978-0-375-87371-3 • EL: 978-0-375-98274-3



“An engrossing tale set against a compelling, seldom-seen backdrop.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*

*This guide was prepared by Susan Geye
a retired Educator and Librarian with over 40 years of service in the field*



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