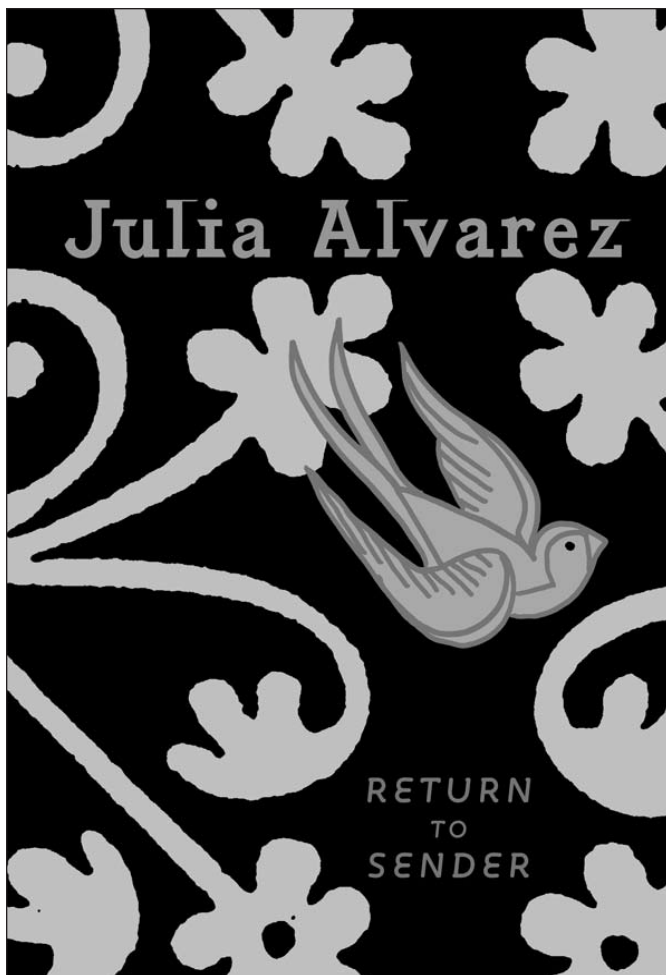


# BOOKNOTES

educators guide



Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-85838-3  
GLB: 978-0-375-95838-0

## THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Values in Conflict  
Friendship • Sacrifice  
Hope • Immigration

GRADES 5 UP

## ABOUT THE BOOK

After Tyler's grandfather dies of a heart attack and his father is hurt in a tractor accident, the family hires migrant Mexican workers to help with the dairy farming. While the Mexicans themselves live in fear of being discovered and deported, Tyler doesn't understand why his father would break the law to hire undocumented workers. And what about the three daughters, particularly Mari, the oldest, who will attend Tyler's school? As Tyler befriends Mari, his feelings become even more confused. His plight intensifies on every front: bullies at school taunt Mari, Mari's uncle is caught running from the border patrol and is arrested, Mari's mother is missing, and immigration officials raid the farm. Can Tyler and Mari find a way to stay friends despite their differences?

"This is the wonderful thing about stories. . . .  
There are no borders. Like swallows, like  
stars, you don't have to stop where one  
country or language or race or religion  
or gender or time period ends and  
another begins."

—Julia Alvarez

## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Ask students to investigate the dangerous journey Mexicans undertake to enter the United States illegally. Students may find a news story about a particular person or family, the vigilantes who watch the borders, the Immigration and Custom Enforcement officials, or any other aspect of the crossing that interests them. After students have finished their research, have them write a brief summary to share with the class and then post their findings on a classroom bulletin board.

## THEMATIC CONNECTIONS QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### VALUES IN CONFLICT

In the beginning, Tyler's feelings for Mari quickly change when he learns she is in the U.S. illegally. Why is this ironic? How does Tyler settle the confusion in his heart and mind about his friendship with Mari?

Why do Clayton and Ronnie find such joy in harassing Mari? How does she respond to their bullying? What does Tyler do or say to them about their treatment of Mari? How do his actions or nonactions make him feel?

### FRIENDSHIP

How is Grandma helping Mr. Rossetti be a better person? How is he helping her? How does this apply to other friendships in the story?

The Paquette and Cruz families accept each other without hesitation and with no prejudice. What does this say about the character of the two families? How do they help each other through difficult situations?

### SACRIFICE

What does Mari's willingness to go to the immigration officials to speak on her parents' behalf say about her nature? Why is she willing to risk her own freedom for her parents? Does Mari's risk pay off? Does she gain what she desires?

As the story concludes, what prompts the change in Tyler's attitude toward leaving the farm? How does his reaction make the move from the farm easier for him and his family?

### HOPE

Mari never gives up hope that her mother is alive and will return to the family. Why is Mari able to keep her dream alive while her sisters are not? How does Mari cope with her fear and anxiety?

## WRITING PROMPTS

- Encourage students to be creative in their format as they write a narrative, short story, play, or poem inspired by either of the writing prompts below. Have students creatively publish their pieces as a "gift of words" for someone involved in either of the scenarios below.

**Option 1:** Tyler has difficulty understanding why he can't tell anyone about the Mexicans his parents have hired to help work on the farm. As Tyler discovers, "One thing's for sure. Sometimes in life he just has to accept stuff he'll never understand." (p. 14) Write about a time in your life when you had to accept a situation you did not understand.

**Option 2:** Tyler and Mari's feelings for each other grow into a close friendship, and Tyler wants desperately to give Mari

a meaningful Christmas present that will cause tears, ". . . the kind that spring in your eyes when you are so touched, your happiness has to borrow from your sadness." (p. 138) Write about a time you cried from happiness.

- Place students in groups of three and ask them to discuss the lessons Tyler learned during the time the Mexicans lived on his family's farm, including the confusing and contradictory examples his parents give him. (p. 239) From the discussion, ask students to make a T-chart listing the situation and/or the event that taught Tyler the lesson and what he learned. Have each student assume Tyler's voice and write a thank-you letter to one of the people involved in the situation explaining what he has learned and how he will apply it to his life.

# CONNECTING TO THE CURRICULUM

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## SOCIAL STUDIES

Based on recent immigration reform legislation in the United States, *Return to Sender* is a timely story about two families torn apart by the current laws. Ask students to form four groups, and ask each group to take a stand on immigration reform after researching the differing views on this increasingly volatile issue.

Students can begin their research by visiting the following Web sites:

Comprehensive Immigration Reform  
[www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/immigration/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/immigration/)

President Barack Obama's Plan for Immigration  
[www.barackobama.com/issues/immigration/](http://www.barackobama.com/issues/immigration/)

Each group should write and present their own plan to the class as if they are making a presentation to Congress. After each presentation, discuss as a class how the plan, if implemented, would affect Tyler and Mari's families.

## HISTORY

The history of the United States is the compiled histories of the immigrants from all reaches of the earth.

One of the prominent faces of immigration, Ellis Island, opened in 1892 at a time when many new laws were signed into legislation, further changing the face of the United States—a process that continues today. Divide the class into groups of three and assign each group a time period to research. Ask your school librarian to help round up appropriate resources for the students to use. Each group should find the legislation that was passed during their time period, the number of immigrants that were permitted to enter the United States, and the most common area(s) to which the immigrants migrated. The groups should make a presentation highlighting their research using a time line and other visual aids. The following Web sites will be helpful.

The History of Immigration in the United States  
[immigration.about.com/od/usimmigrationhistory/  
The\\_History\\_of\\_Immigration\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States.htm](http://immigration.about.com/od/usimmigrationhistory/The_History_of_Immigration_in_the_United_States.htm)

Immigration History  
[history.sandiego.edu/gen/soc/immig.html](http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/soc/immig.html)

The History of Ellis Island  
[library.thinkquest.org/20619/Eihist.html](http://library.thinkquest.org/20619/Eihist.html)

Rapid Immigration  
[www.rapidimmigration.com/usa/1\\_eng\\_immigration\\_  
history.html](http://www.rapidimmigration.com/usa/1_eng_immigration_history.html)

## SCIENCE

The swallows and the stars are important to both Mari and Tyler and together they each learn more about them. Have half of the class research swallows while the other half investigates stars. Each student should prepare a one-page illustrated journal entry complete with research details to add to a “birdwatcher’s journal” or an “astronomer’s journal.” The variety of stars and swallows and the information available about both should allow for an interesting accumulation of facts in the journal format.

## MUSIC

Ask students to make a list of the ways the song “La Golondrina” has meaning to Mari and her family and other Mexican people who have family working in *el norte*. Locate a recording of the song students can listen to. After listening to the song, ask students to write a response to the music and the emotions invoked by the words and music.



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## POST-READING ACTIVITY

Ask students to re-read the letter Mari wrote to the President of the United States on page 52 and to respond in the voice of the President to one or more of the points she raised. Students can share their letters with the class.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Julia Alvarez** grew up in the Dominican Republic before emigrating to the United States at the age of ten. She is the award-winning author of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, *¡Yo!*, and the National Book Critics Circle Award finalist *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Her books for young readers include *Before We Were Free*, *How Tía Lola Came to Visit Stay*, *Finding Miracles*, and the picture books *The Secret Footprints* and *A Gift of Gracias*.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**“Coyotes” Smuggle Mexican Immigrants into the U.S.**  
[www.banderasnews.com/0509/eded-coyote.htm](http://www.banderasnews.com/0509/eded-coyote.htm)

**United States Immigration Support**  
[www.usimmigrationsupport.org/illegal\\_immigration\\_mexico.html](http://www.usimmigrationsupport.org/illegal_immigration_mexico.html)

**The Effect of Illegal Immigration on Public Schools**  
[www.fairus.org/site/PageServer?pagename=research\\_researchf6ad](http://www.fairus.org/site/PageServer?pagename=research_researchf6ad)

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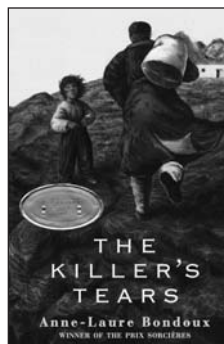
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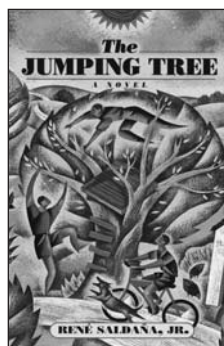
### Finding Miracles

Julia Alvarez  
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