



Judith Ortiz Cofer

Suggested Discussion Questions for Stories From *An Island Like You*

Bad Influence

- Why do you think did Mamá Ana told Rita about wanting to be a dancer and getting married at the age of 15?
- Did the summer in Puerto Rico change Rita? If yes, how?

Arturo's Flight

- Why did Arturo dress the way he did? How did people react to the way Arturo looked? Do you judge people according to the way they dress? Why?
- Why did Arturo like Shakespeare's line "For what care I who calls me well or ill"?

Beauty Lessons

- Sandra and Anita are very different but friends. What does each contribute to the friendship?
- Why do you think the author included the book *Beauty and the Beast* in this story?

Catch the Moon

- Why did the author select "Catch the Moon" as the title of this story?
- Write a paragraph that details what happened when Luis gave Naomi the wheel cover.

An Hour With Abuelo

- How are Abuelo and his grandfather alike?

The One Who Watches

- If Doris had really "looked" at Yolanda, what would she have seen?

Matoa's Mirror

- How is the mirror symbolic of how Matoa sees his life?

Don José of La Mancha

- If Yolanda wanted her mother to be happy, why did she dislike her mother going out with Don José?

Home to El Building

- Anita felt that the barrio was "like an alternate universe." How does life in the barrio differ from life in your neighborhood? How is it similar?

White Balloons

- How had Doris changed from the girl in the "The One Who Watches"?

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1. Which quote below accurately describes the United States as seen through the eyes of the characters? Why?
"America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-



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forming!"—Israel Zangwill

"The metaphor of the melting pot is unfortunate and misleading. A more accurate analogy would be a salad bowl, for, though the salad is an entity, the lettuce can still be distinguished from the chicory, the tomatoes from the cabbage."—Carl N. Degler

"We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams."—Jimmy Carter

2. The barrio is a strong Puerto Rican community. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living and working in close ethnic communities?
3. What lessons do you think the author was trying to teach about human nature, human relations, and stereotypes?
4. Which of the characters would you want as a friend? Why? Which character would you not want as a friend? Why?
5. Did Ortiz Cofer's inclusion of Spanish words help or hinder reading the story?
6. How did people in the barrio reflect pride or shame in their Puerto Rican heritage?
7. How do the cultural values and traditions that the parents and grandparents brought with them from Puerto Rico affect how they interact with their children?
8. Why did the author choose to write the book as a collection of short stories and not a novel?

Suggested Activities for *An Island Like You*

1. Select one character and track how the author develops the character through the book.
2. Select one of the main characters. It has been five years since the events in the book took place.
3. Your character has moved out of El Building and left the barrio. Pretend you are the selected character. Write a letter to someone who still lives in El Building.
4. John Donne wrote that "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." Select one of the characters and describe how his or her actions affected friends and families.
5. Ortiz Cofer describes the sights and sounds of the barrio and Puerto Rico. Ask students to use an art medium to illustrate one scene from the book using the author's description.
6. Select the main characters from three of the stories. Write a scene with the three characters talking in front of El Building.
7. Compare the Irish immigration to the United States in the 1840s with the migration of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. mainland in the 1950s and 1960s. Why did members of each group come to the United States? Where did they settle? What discrimination did they face? How did they influence and transform the cities they settled in?
8. Choose one character in the book and describe how that character is like you or someone you know.
9. Puerto Rico is a commonwealth. Use the Internet, the library, and other resources to research the difference between a state, a territory, and a commonwealth. Include in the research the method by which a territory or a commonwealth could become a state.

These activities were written by
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