



A Discussion Guide

Characters

In Tres Montes

Sonia Ocampo: age 16, believed by her village to be a holy child

Rafael Ocampo: Sonia's handsome older brother, a miner

Felix and Blanca Ocampo: Sonia's parents

Tía Neli: Felix Ocampo's sister, and Sonia's favorite aunt

Abuela: Sonia's dead grandmother who visits in dreams

Luis: Rafael and Sonia's friend who is missing

Señora Clara: Luis' mother

Señor Arenas: owner of the only employment agency in Tres Montes

Carmen: secretary to Señor Arenas

Pancho Muñoz: taxi boy and classmate to Sonia. A poet who is hopelessly in love with her

Armando: Pancho's friend, also a taxi boy

Señor Pasqual: owner of the taxi service in Tres Montes

Ernesto Fermín: police chief of Tres Montes

Conchita Fo: former lounge singer and owner of La Ruina, the local bar

Mongo: knife-wielding barkeep at La Jalada and Pancho's best fan

Inez: the rancher's wife and Cuca, her daughter, who is injured in a fall from a horse

Irina Gomez: the schoolmistress

The Iguana: a kidnapper and secret conspirator with Conchita Fo

In the capital

Ramona: kitchen manager and lead employee sent to the capital by Señor Arenas; mother to Manuel

Eva: kitchen worker at Casa Masón; addicted to romance, harmless gossip, and meddling

Dalia: kitchen worker at Casa Masón; Rafael's love interest.

Teresa: Señora Mason's oldest servant and head of all the help at Casa Masón

Oscar: Señora Masón's chauffeur

Señora Masón: widow and owner of Masón Spices, an international spice company. Sonia's employer.

Umberto Masón: nephew of Katarina Masón. A cad

Minor characters

Marco, the train conductor; **Tomás Melendez,** the police chief's apprentice; **Señor Ruiz,** telegraph and post office manager; **Luz,** little girl saved from a fever by Sonia; **Hector,** one-eared ruffian from the capital

Synopses of the Novel

From the time of her birth, 16-year-old Sonia Ocampo has been believed to be a holy child in Tres Montes, a remote mining village. As such she has received hundreds of petitions, each represented by metal *milagros* pinned to her shawl that weigh on her more and more each year. But when Luis, a friend she is asked to protect, is found murdered, Sonia suspects her entire life has been a fraud.

With Tía Neli's help, Sonia escapes to the capital as a servant in Casa Masón, leaving behind her family — and Pancho, a lovesick taxi boy. Unfortunately, Sonia's brother, Rafael, has also decided to flee Tres Montes, wanting to find a future outside of the mines. Although he confesses his plan to Sonia, he leaves out the dangerous details: He has made secret arrangements with the town's nefarious bar owner, Conchita Fo, to go north with a *pollero*, unaware that he is being double-crossed. Pancho, the taxi boy who ferries him on his errand, overhears his plan but is powerless to reveal it, having taken the taxi boy oath of silence. The search for Rafael begins.

Meanwhile, Sonia has arrived in the gleaming capital in the company of Ramona, the ever-calculating Dalia, and her roommate, Eva. It doesn't take long to discover that life as a servant is hard. Her days are spent meeting the impossible demands of the head servant, Teresa, and dodging unwanted advances from Umberto Masón. It is in the capital, however, that Sonia befriends Oscar, the old chauffeur who will eventually prove a true friend.

Back in Tres Montes, Felix, sick with worry, sends Sonia a letter demanding that she guard her brother's life, a letter that Pancho has the sad task of posting. Unable to live with his guilt about keeping a secret from Sonia, he decides to set out for the capital to offer his help, stowing away on the train, where he is discovered and tossed overboard by the conductor. Pancho eventually is joined by his old friend Mongo, Conchita's barkeep, who has followed the boy to keep him safe.

Abuela's ghost is restless, and she visits Sonia in the capital to shed light on Rafael's disappearance — and his relationship with Dalia. To make things worse, Umberto's attentions have become dangerous. One night, however, Sonia discovers Pancho waiting for her in the shadows. He convinces her to leave with him, telling her it is the only way to keep Rafael alive.

They venture into the city's most dangerous quarters to meet Mongo, who tells them Rafael has been intercepted by a kidnapper named the Iguana, a cohort of Conchita Fo. A hefty ransom will be required to save him — if they can reach him in time. With no money to pay for Rafael's release, Sonia must choose whether to steal Señora Masón's jewelry collection to get the money or let him die.

Sonia confesses the truth about herself to Pancho, fully expecting him to disown her as a fraud and now a thief. Pancho, however, has no intention of abandoning Sonia. Then a new solution is brought to light. She sells the *milagros* that she has been carrying all along. As Mongo orders, Pancho and Sonia return to Tres Montes to wait for him to return with Rafael.

But Mongo is too late. Rafael has been attacked and mutilated, and Mongo has no choice but to deliver him home, where Sonia and Abuela usher him to his death. The people of Tres Montes are thunderstruck. If God abandons Sonia, what does this mean for them? The Ocampos become outcasts.

After Rafael's burial, the Ocampos must come to terms with the lies, fears, and crooked expectations that have defined their lives. She sheds her manta. At last that she is an ordinary girl entitled to her own hopes rather than shouldering those of others. She wants to honor her brother's dreams for a life outside of Tres Montes. She and her parents, in a first act of honesty, begin the Prayer Tree outside the schoolhouse, fastening the *milagros* to the branches.

In epilogue, Sonia and Pancho marry. She becomes the schoolmistress and guardian of the community prayer tree. Pancho becomes a poet - and author of *The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind*.

Discussion Questions

Responsibilities

- Sonia shoulders many burdens for her family and community. What examples can you think of in real life where young people face very adult burdens?
- Irina Gomez and Señora Masón are just two of the novel's characters who have low expectations of Sonia and her classmates. Has anyone ever had low expectations of you or your ability? What impact did that have on you? Are heavy expectations ever a good thing? Why or why not?

Relationships

- There are many romantic relationships in this novel, each very different from the other. Sonia and Pancho. Dalia and Rafael. Oscar and Blanca Ocampo. Teresa and Oscar. Conchita and Capitán Fermin. Umberto and the object of his various attentions. Whose relationship was the most interesting to you? Which was the healthiest and why? Which was the most troubling?
- If you were to go on a date with someone from the novel, who would it be? Why?
- Throughout the novel, we meet people who make personal gain in unsavory situations. Who are the opportunists in the novel? What qualities do they share?
- Who is the most heroic person in the novel? Why?

Risks

- What is harder, keeping a bad secret or revealing one? Explain or give examples.
- Young people often take risks. Why do the young people of Tres Montes want to leave the village? In your opinion, is it worth the risk to leave? What risks do you see your peers take? How do you know when a risk is worthwhile?

Dreams

- Sonia eventually learns the importance of shaping a dream for herself. What is one dream you have for yourself? If you could fashion a *milagro* to ask for that wish, what shape would you create?

About Meg Medina



Meg Medina is a Cuban-American author who writes picture books, middle grade, and Young Adult fiction. The first American citizen in her family, Meg was raised in Queens New York by her single mother -- and a clan of *tios*, *primos*, and *abuelos* who arrived from Cuba over the years. She was the fortunate victim of their storytelling, and credits them with her passion for tales.

Meg's work examines how cultures intersect through the eyes of young people, and she brings to audiences stories that speak to both what is unique in Latino culture and to the qualities that are universal. Although *The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind* is set in a fictional country, it is a story that deals with the roots of migration and the difficult life choices that young people across Latin America face today.

Meg's books have received numerous awards and starred reviews. She is the 2012 winner of the Ezra Jack Keats New Writers Award.

The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind (Candlewick Press, 2012)

ISBN: 978-0-7636-5968-4 \$17.99 Available in audio from Brilliance Audio

Other works

Milagros: Girl From Away (Christy Ottaviano Books: Henry Holt Books for Young Readers (2008)
ISBN: 978-0805082302

Tía Isa Wants a Car (Candlewick Press 2011)
ISBN: 978-0763641566

Tía Isa Quiere Un Carro (Candlewick Press 2012) ISBN: 978-0763657512

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