

General Questions

- Alan Gratz chose to structure this novel by shifting the chapters between three stories from different times and places. Why do you think he did this?
- Select a character, do you think their family was loyal to their home country? Give evidence from the text to support your answer.
- If the living conditions here were similar to any one of the characters, what do you think your family would do- stay or leave, and why?
- Select one character- what do you think is going to happen to their family next?

Character Connections

- Isabel, Mahmoud, and Josef live decades apart. How are their lives similar?
- Pick two characters.
 - How are their families similar to (or different from) each other?
 - How are their struggles similar to (or different from) each other?
- If you were Isabel, what would you tell Josef about coming to Cuba?
- Think of all three characters.
 - Who would you say is the most innocent/naive? Why?
 - Who would you say is the most courageous? Why?
 - Whose situation seems most challenging to you? Why?

Isabel

- Background Knowledge: Why is Cuba a poor place? Has it always been this way?
- On page 43, Fidel Castro makes a speech. Why is this speech important to the plot of Isabel's story?
- How would you describe Isabel's character?
- Why did Isabel's family think the day they departed Cuba was the best time to flee? (p60) Do you agree with this assessment? (Why or why not?)
- Would you say Isabel's family is closely connected or not? Explain with examples from the text.
- On page 64, Luis and his girlfriend, who had been drafted into the police force, were being shot at for deserting the force. (Being drafted means they were required, by law, to join the force.) What would change in your life if people could be drafted into the police?

Mahmoud

- Why does Mahmoud want to stay invisible? (p12) (How does he benefit from invisibility?)
- Mahmoud walks home a different way every day. What does this tell you about his home/ about his life? (p13)
- What happened to Mahmoud and Khalid? What does this tell you about Mahmoud's personality? (p16)
- On page 17, Mahmoud says he should do something about the boy being attacked for his bread, but then he says he knew better.
 - What does this tell you about Mahmoud's character and his situation?
 - Do you think Mahmoud should or should not have acted on his initial thoughts?
- After the explosion, Mahmoud describes Waleed as "still as a statue" and his "eyes were alive, but empty"? Why do you think Waleed reacted in this way? (p49)
- Why do you think Mahmoud's family did not leave months or years ago, when they first knew it was unsafe to live in Syria? (p55)
- If you were a member of Mahmoud's family, what would you be feeling right now? (p55)

Josef

- Josef's best friend, Klaus, had been coerced into joining the Hitler Youth in order to avoid shame and mistreatment of his family. He winced when Herr Meir humiliated Josef in class. Why did Klaus, then, join the group of Hitler Youth who beat him after school? (p24)
- Why did the Hitler Youth on the train let Josef go? (p34)
- Why did the Hitler Youth's face look like "he was the one in trouble" after letting Josef go? (p35)
- Why is Josef's father unwilling to come out of the cabin while they are on the boat? (p56)
- Why were the crew of the "St Louis" treating the passengers with "kindness and respect"? (p56)