

“Trust me: this book will
touch your heart.”
—BARBARA O’CONNOR,
New York Times bestselling
author of *Wish*



SOMETHING LIKE HOME

BY ANDREA BEATRIZ ARANGO; ILLUSTRATED BY ALYSSA BERMUDEZ

EDUCATORS' GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK

Laura Rodríguez Colón has a plan: no matter what the grown-ups say, she *will* live with her parents again. Can you blame her? It's tough to make friends as the new kid at school. And while staying at her aunt's house is okay, it just isn't the same as being in her own space.

So when Laura finds a puppy, it seems like fate. If she can train the puppy to become a therapy dog, maybe she'll be allowed to visit her parents. Maybe the dog will help them get better and things will finally go back to the way they should be.

After all, how do you explain to others that you're technically a foster kid, even though you live with your aunt? And most importantly . . . how do you explain that you're not where you belong, and you just want to go home?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrea Beatriz Arango is the Newbery Honor-winning author of *Iveliz Explains It All*. She was born and raised in Puerto Rico and is a former public school teacher with almost a decade of teaching experience. Andrea now writes the types of children's books she wishes students had more access to. She balances her life in Virginia with trips home to see her family and eat lots of tostones de pana. When she's not busy writing, you can find her enjoying nature in the nearest forest or body of water.



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PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Our homes help make us who we are. What, or who, is home to you? Home might be a physical place,—a place that makes you feel safe, most yourself, and cared for. Or, instead of a physical place, home might be a person or a group of people. Describe your home or homes either in words or using a visual medium, highlighting the aspects that feel most important.
2. A major theme in this book is trust. For Laura, making friends is easy because she is loving and loyal. But it can also be difficult because it requires her to trust other people, which can be hard. What is easy or difficult for you about making friends? What kind of friend are you or would you like to be? What are some qualities you value that you offer to others in a friendship?
3. What is betrayal? Can you imagine a situation in which betraying a person who trusts you is the ethical (or right) choice to make?
4. Laura is becoming a stronger reader and using tools to help her. Everybody, no matter where they start, can become a stronger reader. Imagine yourself as a more confident reader than you are right now. What does that look like for you? If reading is hard, what steps can you take to help yourself get the support you deserve? If you're a strong reader, how can you challenge yourself to become even better? What do you look forward to reading?
5. What do you know about foster care? What support do you think a young person in foster care needs?

DISCUSSION AND WRITING QUESTIONS

1. In the first three poems (“Time and Space,” “Did You Know?” and “My Room That Is Not My Room”), what do we learn about Laura? How does she feel, and how do you know? What does she like to do? And what are you curious about? Do you recognize parts of yourself in Laura or in her feelings?
2. Throughout her story, Laura writes paired poems: that is two poems in a row that are connected to each other. Here are three examples: “Questions I’ve Asked Janet” (p. 11) is followed by the blank “Answers That Janet Has Given Me” (p. 12). When Laura is introduced at her new school, she shares with us “The Introduction I Don’t Make” (p. 19), which is followed by “The Introduction I Do Make” (p. 20). And “Things I’ve Already Done That Are ‘Not Okay’ According to Titi Silvia” (p. 32) and “Things Titi Silvia Has Already Done That Are ‘Not Okay’ (She Is Not My Mom)” (p. 33). Analyze both poems in a set: What do you learn about Laura’s past and about her hopes and dreams and fears from each poem? Then either write a third poem, making a set of three; or write your own two-poem set that relates to your own life. Feel free to borrow titles, style, or ideas from Laura’s poems.
3. Laura’s dad calls her his “little woodpecker.” (p. 30) Bird facts are important to Laura, and she shares them throughout her story. She also compares herself to different birds. For example, she calls herself a “snuggled-up little parakeet” (p. 16) when she walks into a classroom that makes her feel safe because of all the books and plants. Be on the lookout as you read for references to a flamingo, a heron, a gray parrot, an eagle, and more. Pick one that you find—even if it’s not on this list—and explain what you believe it means in the context of Laura’s story. Write a poem (any kind of poem you like; it doesn’t have to rhyme) in which you compare yourself to your favorite animal.
4. In a poem or in prose, describe when Sparrow and Laura meet for the first time from Sparrow’s point of view. How is Sparrow feeling? How do his actions show his feelings? What has already happened to him? What are his hopes? Use details and description in your writing.
5. Benson is cheerful and eager to make friends with Laura. What causes Laura’s initial hesitation? What events in the story show how Benson’s and Laura’s friendship grows and changes? How is she a good friend to Benson? How is Benson a good friend to her? How does their friendship compare to your own friendships?
6. What are Titi Silvia’s personality traits, likes, and dislikes? Use evidence from the story. Do you believe Titi Silvia is a good person for Laura to trust? Why or why not? What does Laura’s reaction to life with Silvia tell you about how her life must have been before?

DISCUSSION AND WRITING QUESTIONS

(CONTINUED)

7. Why do you think Laura didn't go with her mother when she came to school? Imagine Laura's mother spoke to her when she was at school. What do you think she said? Why do you think Laura felt like she should have gone with her mother?
8. When parents are not taking care of their children or are putting them in danger, the children sometimes have to make extremely difficult decisions to protect their parents and themselves. Sometimes, like in Laura's story, the decisions a child makes to protect their parents or themselves makes the parents angry—even when it saved their life. What difficult decision did Laura make when she found her parents unconscious? What are Laura's biggest fears about this decision? What would you tell Laura if you could talk to her about this decision and its aftermath?
9. What and who is home for Laura? How do you know? What is her definition of home? How did it change throughout the story?
10. Laura writes a total of eight letters to her parents. Some she sends (#1, #2, #3, #4, #5, and the unnumbered letter on p. 234) and two that she doesn't. Why do you think she doesn't send some letters? What does she reveal about her feelings, fears, and hopes in the letters she doesn't send? Is there a letter you would like to write to somebody but not send? If so, write it as a poem or as prose.
11. Learning how to take responsibility for one's actions is another major theme in Laura's story. In her early letters to her parents, Laura apologizes to them for calling 911. Laura also apologizes to Benson when she hurts his feelings, to her Titi Silvia when she hurts her feelings, and to Sparrow when she scares him. Compare the apology Laura makes to her parents in her letters to the apologies that she offers to either Benson, Titi Silvia, or Sparrow. How are the apologies different? What is Laura responsible for, and what is she not responsible for at all? Have you ever apologized for something that you did not need to apologize for or have you not yet apologized for something that you should take responsibility for?
12. What do you think is meant by Laura's final stanza: "And eventually / eventually / we'll all make it / to where we belong"? (p. 244) How does it reflect Laura's change and growth? What feelings do you think she is experiencing as she writes these lines? And how is it different from her feelings at the beginning of the book? Write Laura a poem in response to her book. What are your thoughts and feelings as you finish reading her story? What do you still have questions about? Do the events in her story remind you of events in your own life?

POST-READING QUESTIONS

1. Several times, Laura shares her confusion about how to do the right thing and whether she can trust herself to make big decisions. Where in her story do you see Laura blame herself for her parents' silence or absence? How does Laura learn to accept that her parents' addiction is not her fault? When do you see Laura begin to have more peace, and what do you believe helped her gain this peace?
2. Laura's titi Silvia is Puerto Rican and wants Laura to have a stronger connection with the island by learning about its culture and foods, and by speaking Spanish, which is spoken in Puerto Rico. Why is it difficult for Laura to accept Titi Silvia's encouragement? Why do you think Laura should try or not try to do so?
3. Laura learns that her mother was thrown out of her own mother's home because she had a girlfriend. Laura's mother is now in a relationship with Laura's father. Several characters in Laura's story introduce themselves with their pronouns. Dr. Tash uses they/them pronouns. Without writing anything down, consider: How do you identify? What questions you have about gender and/or sexual identities? How could you learn more?

ALSO BY
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