

Illegal by Bettina Restrepo

Student Study Guide: Chapter-by-Chapter Questions

Section 1

Chapter 1

- Think about Nora with her skinny bird legs, white barrettes, and wincing at crunching noise. What kind of person is she in the first chapter?
- What does the closing line of chapter 1 reveal about Nora's attitude? Is that true? What circumstance would make someone feel like that?

Chapter 3

- What is the significance that the church (in a store) is gone?

Chapter 4

- By the end of the chapter, list all the items and people in these chapters that have disappeared according to Nora—what is the effect on Nora of all this disappearing? Which is the most touching to you?
- "Someone else owned their stuff and they were gone." Is "stuff" important to a person's identity?

Chapter 5

- Nora thinks, "Do something" (at bottom 19). Have you ever felt like that? What do you think Nora should do at this point?
- Who does Nora lash out at after the voice says her father is gone? Why does she lash out?

Chapter 6

- List what the voice says. Nora wonders if it is from her or from God. Which do you think? Is there another option?

Chapter 7

- "Are voices things...." What do you think Nora is feeling?
- "We need to be a we again." Why does Nora feel this way?

Chapter 8

- Nora and Aurora are disobeying Grandma. Is disobedience ever okay? How do you know? Have you ever done something that was wrong but for good reasons?
- Do you accept Grandma's definition of "faith?"
- Is Nora fair in calling Grandma's definition of faith "stupidity?"
- Who is right Nora or Grandma? Could they both be right?
- Page 41 - Cedula blinked like a sleepy baby. Why compare the town to a baby? What does that simile tell us about Cedula?
- Why does Hector merely say "until?" What does he intend to say and why doesn't he?

Chapter 9

- Why does Nora say she is abandoning her country (page 45) when she previously stated to her grandmother she wasn't?

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SECTION 2

Chapter 11

- The chapter titles have suddenly switched to English. Why?
- Nora’s and Arturo’s hair parts the same way. How else are they alike?
- Mama works herself too hard, caring for others—is this similar to your experience with your own mother?
- How are Mama and Nora similar?

Chapter 13

- Define sanctuary. How does it relate to the chapter’s content?
- In Cedula everything is dry. Now find words that describe Houston’s climate.
- The teens Nora sees walking the street are “like a pack of feral dogs.” Why “feral dogs?” (You may need to look “feral” up.)
- Predict if Houston will be a good place for Nora?

Chapter 14

- Nora considers the advice of her family as she pays for lunch. “Pretend you know what you are doing”, “Look them in the eye” is this good advice? Does your family have similar advice for you?

Chapter 15

- What does the phrase “eye of the beholder” mean?
- How does the title apply to the chapter?
- What’s the offered price? What do they take the apartment for? What does this reveal about Nora?

Chapter 16

- This chapter contains a comparison between Houston and Matamoros. Which is best: Matamoros, Houston, or Cedula? What is positive about each? What’s negative about each?
- The cake decorator is preparing for a *quinceañera* and Nora imagines her own party as the voice comes back. Why does it return at this moment?

Chapter 17

- What could the dead rat be symbolic of? Is there something decaying in their lives that they need to clean?
- Is it natural or cruel for Nora to begin “forgetting her father”?
- Why are pierced ears so important? How are they important to you? When did you get them? (or when did your friends or family members get them?)

Chapter 18

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- The woman snaps her fingers “as if we were dogs.” Make a list of the characters Nora and Mama encounter so far. Who treats them as human and who as animals? Why do people look at others as less than human?
- Nora mistakes a Colombian woman for a Mexican and comments on the different accent. Nora is unaware of the different countries and makes an innocent mistake. Have you ever done this? Why would it matter to the Colombian so much? Do you tend to assume people are all the same based on looks?
- Who has Nora fought—physically or socially so far? Nora says she wants to find her papa because he’s her protector, but as the novel has progressed, does Nora seem like she needs a protector? Why does she want Papa?
- Nora concludes the chapter declaring she will always fight after seeing the man “sitting.” In what ways in your life or the lives of those around you can you say some have begun “sitting.” How are others fighting? Can you do both?

Chapter 19

- When Nora is propositioned by the furniture storeowner it leads to thoughts of being washed for Mass. This situation causes Nora to doubt her faith. Is it understandable? Is it natural? Predict if she will she lose her faith?
- Why might Nora be attracted/ concerned with Manuela’s jewelry?
- What might the ‘eyes like *abuela*’ and Tessa’s age foreshadow?

Chapter 20

- Mama’s height vs. Nora’s is an indication of her growing up—in three days. How is mama “shrinking;” how is Nora “growing”?

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SECTION 3

Chapter 21

- In the nightmare what fears of Nora are revealed?
- When she wakes, she has been crying. Notice that she says she “couldn’t” be a little girl anymore. Why does the author have Nora saying “couldn’t” instead of some other word? What does it imply about how Nora feels at this point?
- In a chapter entitled “Mr. Mann” what do we find out about him?
- What do you think happened to Tessa at this point in the novel?

Chapter 22

- Figure out what “*No entiendo*” would translate to in English from the context.
- Describe Nora and Mr. Mann’s interaction in this chapter.
- Notice the red star tattoo on the two girls’ shoulders. What does this indicate?
- Who pushed Nora? Why?
- Begin making a chart. On one side, title it Flora, on the other, Mr. Mann. As Nora interacts with each, write down how they interact and what Nora thinks of them and what they think of her. Continue this chart each time these two characters show up.

Chapter 23

- What information does Keisha reveal about Tessa?
- How might Flora be “the lifeguard” even though she isn’t a literal lifeguard?
- Continue to track Nora’s interaction with both Flora and Mr. Mann

Chapter 24

- Look up “nostalgia/ nostalgic” Why is Nora nostalgic for Cedula? How is Houston worse? How is it better?

Chapter 25

- Continue to track Nora’s interaction with both Flora and Mr. Mann
- Why is Flora horrible to Keisha? What does it do for Flora to be so mean?
- Why is Flora so mean to Keisha by calling her names, but then is so kind to Nora by advising her to not sit on the stoop at night? What might be behind Flora’s kindness to Nora? What might motivate her cruelty to Keisha?

Chapter 26

- Explain why Flora wants to help Nora in one sentence, and then pushes her away in the next. Why is Flora acting like that?
- Aside from being a mortal sin (you may need to look up “mortal sin”) why does Nora think Flora shouldn’t steal?
- Compare the kind of friends Nora has made: Keisha and Flora. Create a chart like the one below:

Quality	Keisha	Flora
Age		

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Friendliness		
Background		
Appearance		
What do they “get” from Nora?		
What do they give to Nora?		
Any other qualities you can think of list in this column.		

Chapter 27

- Flora wishes her brother would “get capped” and she has the beginnings of a star tattoo. Speculate as to what Flora’s home life might be like? Knowing these details of her background, can you understand why she acts the way she does? Why or why not?
- Why does Nora hate the telephone?

Chapter 28

- Continue to track Nora’s interaction with Mr. Mann on your chart from chapter 22.
- Find the section beginning, “Mama wiped another tear from her eye.” What is motivating Nora in addition to finding Papa? Do you think she is as focused on finding Papa as Mama was?
- The chapter concludes with Nora doubting God for herself and for Mr. Mann at this point. Is this understandable? Does it mean she has abandoned her faith? What would your advice be to Nora at this moment?

Chapter 29

- Keisha’s present is “ugly and horrible” but Nora loves them. Why?
- Finally Flora returns. What is Flora’s role here? How does it relate to what she called herself when Nora met her?
- Look at the concluding sentence “It seems everyone here was mad about something.” What are each of the main characters mad about? List Mama, Nora, Flora, Keisha, Mr. Mann, and Jorge. Some might not be obviously mad about anything. Return to this question as you progress through the novel.

Chapter 30

- Nora describes the schoolroom as “an oasis of education.” Is that your opinion of what she sees?
- Why do you think Nora no longer hears “the voice” anymore?

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SECTION 4

Chapter 31

- Why is everyone so upset because of the fight? What are they afraid of? What's the big deal about one fight?
- Predict what significant things will happen on Nora's birthday, her 15th, when she "becomes a woman."

Chapter 32

- What does Nora mean about "starting to look like Mr. Mann"?
- What's the impact of the last sentence of the chapter? Notice its length and placement. After long sentences, what does this isolated short sentence do? How does it relate to the feeling Nora must have at this point in her story?

Chapter 33

- Speculate as to the meaning of *mentiroso* from the context of the passage (not the glossary in the back).
- How does Nora's battle cry "We are not victims" work here? Is it effective? Why does Nora use it here?
- Track how Flora and Mr. Mann interact with Nora on your chapter 22 chart. How is "the shoe on the other foot" in this chapter? Why do they act the way they do in this chapter?

Chapter 34

- Nora compares Mama to Mr. Mann. Why? How are they alike and different?
- Nora's realization at the end of the chapter is powerful. Has she had anything else throughout the book but family?

Chapter 35

- Explain how Tessa's absence helps Nora and Manuela to connect.
- Describe how each of the characters helps Nora to recover.

Chapter 36

- Explain why Nora lashes out at the others in this chapter. Is she right to do so? Is it understandable if it's the wrong thing? What would your advice be to her at this moment?
- What does the proof of Papa's death reveal about his character?

Chapter 37

- How is the title fitting to this chapter?

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SECTION 5

Chapter 39

- The chapter concludes with Nora angry at God at this point. Is this understandable? Does it mean she has abandoned her faith? What would your advice be to Nora at this moment?

Chapter 40

- Suddenly the voice is back. Why? How has it changed?

Chapter 42

- After you finish reading the chapter, explain how the title fits this chapter.

Chapter 43

- Notice the voice is repeated in Mr. Mann's words. Explain Mr. Mann's words about home and their wisdom. Does Mr. Mann represent God or an agent of God?

Chapter 44

- The chapter is called "Sweet and Sour." What in this chapter is sweet? What is sour? Name two other things from the whole novel so far that fit the label "sweet" and then name two others that are "sour"

Chapter 45

- What could Nora's suggestion for the restaurant name be?
- What are other names Nora could have suggested for the restaurant?

Chapter 46

- Even though Nora has come-of-age now, is it fair for her Grandma to say she "always be a little girl to me?"
- Why does Nora feel that the voice doesn't matter anymore now that she has found her own?
- Track Nora's relationship with Flora and Mr. Mann in this chapter, finishing the chart you started in chapter 22.
- "I Matter" is on the sign Nora makes. Explain how each main character comes to this realization throughout the novel.

Chapter 47

- How does the author foreshadow the identity of the school official?

Epilogue

- How has Nora achieved what she wants? How is Papa really there?

After You Finish

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- Describe two ideas you might write about if you were to extend the novel to include what happens next.