

Illegal by Bettina Restrepo

General Class Discussion

- DISCUSISON/ WRITING Grandma's sayings. Collect all from the novel and assemble into a book of advice, illustrating each. On the facing page, evaluate each on their truthfulness with examples from the novel or from your own life or experience.
- DISCUSISON/ WRITING Hard choices. Consider many of the hard decisions Nora faces where there is seemingly no right answer. What criteria does she use to decide how to proceed? Does she depend on her heart or her head? Are there any factors that affect her decision making?
- DISCUSISON/ WRITING Consider the following ideas by Goethe and Shakespeare as you evaluate the characters of *Illegal* based on the criteria (or select one quote to work with). Which characters seem to live up to the ideas? Which fail to? (Paraphrasing the quote might be very helpful to do first.)
 - Treat a man as he appears to be, and you make him worse. But treat a man as if he already were what he could potentially could be, and you make him what he should be.—Goethe
 - ... [treat them] much better. Use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape whipping? ... Use them after your own honour and dignity; the less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty.—Shakespeare

Literary Techniques

Motifs

1. DISCUSISON/ WRITING/ GROUP WORK Motifs: examine the recurrence of the following elements in the novel: dirt, water, jewelry, tattoos. How does each seem to change in meaning or importance? Teachers may want to assign one motif per group or per student to facilitate a quick look at motifs.

Bildungsroman (Coming of Age Novel):

1. DISCUSISON/ WRITING How does Nora's identity change throughout the novel? Compare Nora from the beginning third of the novel to the middle third, to the end in a chart listing traits (personality and physical) each with some textual evidence for each section.
2. DISCUSISON/ WRITING Compare this coming of age story with another. Some examples include: *The Harry Potter* novels, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, or *The Secret Life of Bees*.
3. DISCUSISON/ WRITING How is this novel a coming of age for Nora? Leaving aside the party aspects of a quinceañera, the social purpose is to mark when a girl is recognized as becoming a woman. What events in the plot seem to be markers of Nora's becoming a woman?
4. DISCUSISON/ WRITING Even if you aren't from Mexico or an immigrant, what can you find in Nora's story that you can identify with?
5. DISCUSISON/ WRITING Nora develops her voice over the course of the novel. What are the most crucial moments, and what does she say during each, that show her development?
6. DISCUSISON/ WRITING What's the significance of calling Nora's birthday "sweet sixteen for my American girl." How does this show her shifting cultural identity? Compare traditions in quinceañera and sweet sixteen (old fashioned if necessary).