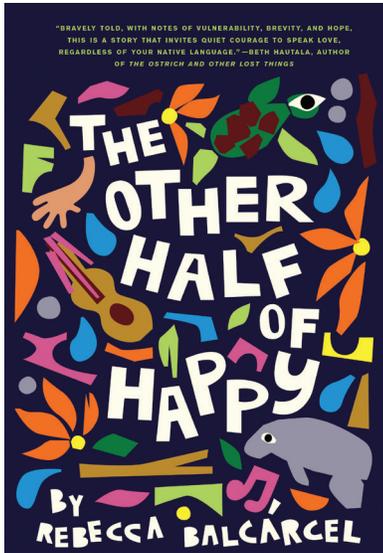


DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE OTHER HALF OF HAPPY



ABOUT THE GUIDE

Cindy L. Rodriguez is the author of the YA novel *When Reason Breaks* (Bloomsbury 2015) and the essay “I’m a Survivor” from *Life Inside My Mind: 31 Authors Share Their Personal Struggles* (Simon Pulse 2018). She is also a founder of the *Latinxs in Kid Lit* blog. Before becoming a teacher in 2000, she was an award-winning reporter for *The Hartford Courant* and a researcher for *The Boston Globe’s* Spotlight Team. She holds degrees from the University of Connecticut and Central Connecticut State University and has two teaching certifications. She is currently a middle school reading specialist in Connecticut. She can be reached at cindyrodriguez71@gmail.com.

1. What is the meaning behind the title *The Other Half of Happy*? What is the other half of happy, and how does it relate to the characters in the novel?
2. Throughout the novel, the Carrillo family’s concerns about Memitó’s changing behavior continue to grow. By the end of the novel, the family is still investigating what’s going on with him. The author does not “solve” this problem by giving us a definite diagnosis. How do you feel about this as a reader? Is it okay to leave this issue unresolved? Why or why not?
3. When her father asks for an “esprinkler” at Home Depot, Quijana says, “Sometimes I wish Dad didn’t have an accent” (11). Later, when a student makes fun of Zuri’s British accent, Quijana says, “But who makes fun of people’s accents? That kid has no class” (136). Why does Quijana feel differently about her father’s than she does about Zuri’s? Is this type of dual thinking common? Do we act a certain way with our family and a different way with our friends?
4. Throughout the novel, Quijana often wonders why her family can’t be “regular” or “normal.” From her perspective, what would her family look like or act like if they were “normal” or “regular”? Is there such a thing as a “normal” or “regular” family? Why or why not? Why is this kind of thinking problematic?



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5. Quijana is named after the fictional character Don Quixote, who Quijana describes as a failure. Her parents argue that he makes the effort, and that is what matters. Do you agree with her parents? What is the outcome when Quijana tries something new or finally tries something she has been avoiding? Do you think her name is an appropriate match for her personality? Why or why not?
6. How are Quijana's friendships with Jayden and Zuri important to the story? In what ways are they good friends to each other? By supporting her plan to run away, are they being good friends or not?
7. Mr. Carrillo faces certain struggles as a Guatemalan-born man living in the United States, and Quijana faces certain struggles as a U.S.-born girl of Guatemalan descent. How are their struggles similar? How are they different?
8. What are some of the ups and downs Quijana experiences with her father? How is their relationship different after the incident with the guitar? How do you anticipate their trip to Guatemala will change their relationship?
9. Early in the story, Quijana says, "Grandma Miller says to never apologize for who you are, but who am I?" (55). Does Quijana have a better sense of who she is by the end of the story? How has she grown and changed? Later, she says, "Right now, we're all unfinished. And unfinished is fine" (298). What does she mean by this?
10. How is Quijana's relationship with Grandma Miller similar to her relationship with her abuela in Guatemala? How are the relationships different? What kind of impact do you think Grandma Miller will have on Quijana? How does Quijana's relationship with her abuela change during the story?
11. What role does music play in Quijana's life? Are there things you turn to in the way Quijana turns to music? Why, and when?
12. What do you think about how Quijana handled the situation with Jayden once she realized he couldn't like her as more than a friend? Have you had a friend go through a similar struggle with their identity? What did you tell them? Is there something that you wish you had done differently?
13. When Quijana receives the huipil from her abuela, she says, "It's totally beautiful. And totally out of the question" (7). Why is it out of the question? How does starting junior high school impact her decision to wear the huipil?
14. Quijana experiences criticism from other members of the Latinx community. She is called a "coconut" and a "pocha" by other Latinx students, and her cousin questions why she calls her father "Dad" instead of "Papi." As a result, Quijana feels like she's not a "real Latina." Why does the author include these examples of intra-community criticism?
15. Quijana witnesses a white student address racist remarks to other Latinx students at the bus stop. At first, Quijana does not say or do anything. By the end of the novel, however, she approaches the Latino boys and stands up for them. Use the bus stop scenes to discuss what it means to be a perpetrator, a bystander, and an upstander. What role have you played in similar situations in your life?

