

Regardless of grade level, all students who are taking Spanish 2 or Honors Spanish 2 in September are required to do the summer reading. Below is a study guide to assist you with your reading. You are not required to hand in the answers to this study guide; however, you will be tested on the book the first full week of classes in September.

When I Was Puerto Rican Esmeralda Santiago

The author

Esmeralda Santiago was born in rural Puerto Rico and lived there, although frequently changing homes, until she was thirteen years old. In 1961, she moved to the United States. She was the eldest in a family that would eventually include eleven children. Santiago attended New York City's Performing Arts High School, where she majored in drama and dance. After eight years of part-time study at community colleges, she transferred to Harvard University with a full scholarship. She graduated magna cum laude in 1976. Later, she earned her master's degree at Sarah Lawrence College and was awarded honorary doctorates from Trinity University and Pace University.

However, Santiago's success did not come easily. She faced discrimination and economic instability as a newly arrived immigrant. She also helped to support her mother and siblings. She describes her experiences in her first book, *When I Was Puerto Rican* (1994), her second work, *America's Dream* (1996), and *Almost a Woman* (1999). The themes in these works include immigration, Puerto Rican identity and self-discovery, the shift to new culture, and acceptance of a bicultural, multiethnic and bilingual model. The retelling of her memories has made her an inspiration to women in search of their identity and for Latina/o readers who struggle to assimilate into American culture without giving up their traditions and language.

The book

Santiago's memoir tells of her remarkable journey from the *barrios* of Puerto Rico to her graduation from Harvard University. A moving narrative of survival, *When I Was Puerto Rican* explores the universal immigrant theme of assimilation and its effects on family, culture, and identity.

The story begins in Puerto Rico in the 1950s. Santiago is the first of what will eventually be eleven children born to parents who are not married, and whose unmarried status is a source of constant tension in the household. Santiago describes her world, in both its beauty and its sadness, with a clear-eyed narration of the tastes, smells, and sounds of the Puerto Rican countryside, and the rituals,

concerns, and joys of her big, unruly family. For all its poverty and privation, however, Esmeralda is comfortable in this environment and knows who she is and where she stands. But at 13, she moves with her mother and several siblings to the alien, urban world of New York City. Here she must remake herself while struggling with a new language, a new culture, a new school, a new life, and a bewildering new set of rules and expectations of how a girl should behave.

The World Language Department at ACHS chose this book because it chronicles the experiences of the author in her native country as well as those in her new, adopted country and how those two experiences differ. It is an account that captures the difficulty of immigration, assimilation, and self-discovery amongst those in the Latino community who choose to come to the United States in search of a better life. Such experiences are still occurring in the United States, as we know, and the hardships they face nowadays are similar, if not entirely the same, to those described by Santiago. Please think about this as you read.

The test

Format

- There will be 24 short answer questions. You will be required to answer 20 of them, each with a value of 5 points. Concise, specific explanations will be required. Vague generalizations will not count for much.

What you should gather from your reading

- Santiago's family: who they are, what they're like, what they offer the story
- The relationship Santiago has with her siblings and other family members
- The relationship Santiago has with her parents
- The relationship between *Mami* and *Papi*
- Effect(s) of moving around to different homes on the family
- The concept of *jíbaro* and why it's mentioned frequently by the author
- The concept of *casi señorita* and how it pertains to Santiago's every day
- Roles and expectations for women and men in Puerto Rico
- Roles and expectations for women and men in New York/United States
- Differences in the landscapes of Macún and New York City
- Santiago's impressions of NYC and the United States: before and after
- Concepts of love: what is love? what does it look like?
- Concepts of *dignidad* and how it pertains to the immigrant life
- Puerto Rican identity: what makes someone Puerto Rican?
- The title: what is the effect of using the past tense?
- Why Santiago uses Spanish for some words/ideas and not others
- How you would've handled your life if you'd had Santiago's life

Enjoy the book and we'll see you in September!