

Spring, 2009 - In the Time of the Butterflies/Before We Were Free by Julia Alvarez

In the Time of the Butterflies

In 1960, Minerva, Patria, and Maria Teresa Mirabel were brutally murdered because of their involvement in the underground movement to depose Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo. The Mirabel sisters, codenamed "Las Mariposas" (the butterflies), were instrumental in founding the underground movement and inspiring the formation of resistance cells throughout the country. "In the Time of the Butterflies" by Julia Alvarez tells the true story of the brave Butterflies through the lens of fiction, highlighting their inspiring bravery in the face of cruel despotism. Written with quiet lyricism, Alvarez's novel becomes a universal story of history, freedom, and human courage.

Events

Book Discussion by Judy Levin at the Highland Park Public Library: Tuesday, March 25, 1 pm, Auditorium

Noted book discussion leader Judy Levin leads a book discussion of *In the Time of the Butterflies* at the Library.

Book discussion of *Before We Were Free* for grades 5-8 at the Highland Park Library: Saturday, May 16, 11 am-12:30 pm

The Highland Park Library will offer a book discussion of *Before We Were Free*, a *mariposa* craft and *pastellitos* refreshments for young people in grades 5-8. Mariposas (Spanish for butterflies) and pastellitos pastries are woven through the book's narrative about an adolescent girl's experiences in the Dominican Republic during an attempt to overthrow the country's dictator, El Jefe, in the 1960s.

Links

[Penguin Reading Guide to *In the Time of the Butterflies*](#)

JuliaAlvarez.com: The official website of the author.

[Julia Alvarez](#): A biography of Julia Alvarez, available through Contemporary Authors Online. (log in with your Highland Park Library card)

[Something To Declare](#): An interview with Julia Alvarez from salon.com.

[Sisters in Death](#): A review from The New York Times Book Review by Roberto Gonzalez Echeverria. (log in with your Highland Park Library card)

[Overview of "In the Time of the Butterflies"](#) Darren Felty provides a quick look at the themes and structure of "In the Time of the Butterflies" for Gale's Literature Resource Center. (log in with your Highland Park Library card)

[Find information in the Gale Literary Reference Center](#). (log in with your Highland Park Library card)

[Search Bloom's Literary Reference Online](#)(log in with your Highland Park Library card)

Before We Were Free

Grades 6 ? 10

Julia Alvarez and her family escaped from the Trujillo ruled Dominican Republic when she was only 10 years old. *Before We Were Free* is based on stories of relatives and friends who remained behind.

The book begins in 1960 as 12-year-old narrator Anita watches the last of her relatives flee the family compound. Only her family and her uncle are left of their large extended family. While the happy security of a childhood surrounded by family and friends is gone, Anita still attends the American school and develops a crush on the boy next door. Gradually though, both Anita and the reader learn of the horrors of the Trujillo regime, the disappearances, the torture, and the killings. She learns of her family's efforts to topple Trujillo and comes to know the dangers they all face.

When the dictator is assassinated in 1961, the regime is not toppled. The dictator's son brutalizes the country to avenge his father. Anita's father and uncle are arrested, her brother seeks sanctuary in an embassy, and she and her mother go into hiding in a friend's bedroom closet. The talkative happy girl becomes silent until she learns to pour out her feelings in a diary.

Anita and the reader learn the price of freedom.

[Random House Reading Guide to *Before We Were Free*](#)

[Random House Interview](#) with author Julia Alvarez

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