

DISCUSSION GUIDE

SHINE ON, LUZ VÉLIZ!



ABOUT THE BOOK

Luz Véliz is a soccer star—or rather, she *was* a soccer star. With her serious knee injury, it’s unlikely she’ll be back on the field anytime soon. But without soccer, who is she? Even her dad treats her differently now—like he doesn’t know her or, worse, like he doesn’t even like her. When Luz discovers a knack for coding, it feels like a lifeline. If she can ace the May Showcase, she’ll skip a level in her coding courses, impress the intriguing Trevor, and have her parents cheering her on from the sidelines, just the way she likes it. But something—someone—is about to enter her life. And when Solana arrives, nothing will be the same, ever again. A beautiful coming-of-age story, *Shine On, Luz Véliz!* celebrates identity, language, heritage, family, and the determination to follow one’s own inner light.

ABOUT THE GUIDE

This discussion guide contains questions for classroom discussions and young reader book clubs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebecca Balcárcel is the author of *The Other Half of Happy*, which won the Pura Belpré Author Honor. Her poems and essays have appeared in journals such as *Third Coast* and *North American Review*. She is a professor at Tarrant County College and lives in Belford, Texas. *Shine On, Luz Véliz!* is her second novel.



1. NEGOTIATING IDENTITY

After being pushed out of the soccer season, everything changes for Luz. Her identity as a talented athlete is now gone, her dad has stepped down as her soccer coach, and worst of all, she and her dad are not as close as they once were. Luz observes, “Being good at things was the only way to feel good. I thought being Luz meant kicking a ball” (p. 15). Her neighbor Mr. Mac, a constant friend and encourager, challenges her to be “Luz in the world” because that is the “key to everything” (p. 15). How has Luz’s identity and frame of reference changed? Why does Luz feel like she has lost her uniqueness? What are your unique superpowers?

2. FEAR AND LOSS

Throughout *Shine On, Luz Véliz!*, Balcárcel highlights various characters dealing with fear and loss. Luz fears the changes she sees in her dad and mourns the loss of the close bond they once shared, even labeling him him “Before Dad” and “After Dad” (p. 7). Luz’s half-sister Solana experiences the loss of her beloved mother in Guatemala and fears that ICE immigration officers might take her away. What are some additional examples of fears and losses other characters grapple with, including Mr. Mac, Mr. and Mrs. Véliz, and Skyler? What happens to each character as a result of such fears and losses? Do you fear losing anything?

3. THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

a) Balcárcel interweaves two languages, Spanish and English, throughout *Shine On, Luz Véliz!* Luz must revisit her elementary Spanish speaking skills due to Solana’s abrupt arrival from Guatemala. In turn, Solana has a crash course learning English as soon as she arrives in the U.S. At first, Luz is somewhat annoyed by the whole situation, but she soon catches on to Spanish and begins including Solana in conversations, while Solana quickly learns English phrases. In what other ways is the power of language illustrated throughout the text? In what ways do the two languages indicate the common interests shared by the different characters?

b) Balcárcel uses colorful metaphors, similes, and analogies to illustrate Luz’s journey. She compares the relationship of Luz’s parents to that of taffy: “instead of stretching it can snap” (p. 11). She also likens Luz’s mom’s preference for wanting things to go smoothly to a symphony: “timed right, everything harmonizing” (p. 12). Another example is: “I’m a radio whose dials is turning, turning, trying to tune into a signal. Still hearing static” (p. 25). What other examples of figurative language can you find in Balcárcel’s writing? What analogies can you draw to illustrate your own life?

4. DISCOVERY

Luz fortuitously stumbles upon Ms. Freeman’s Robotics class during Athletic Hour while roaming the school halls. To qualify for the advanced class with other sixth graders, she must present a robotics code and project at the Spring Showcase. This ultimately sets her on a determined path toward experimental discovery. Mr. Mac encourages Luz to “build yourself,” “create who you want to be,” and “add layers to your life” (p. 38). How is Luz challenged to “discover, but also to (re)create herself” (p. 38), in Mr. Mac’s words? What risks does Luz take? What layers does she gain?

5. FAMILY AND BELONGING

Thanks to Solana, Luz learns a painful lesson about the importance of putting people first—especially her own family. Almost immediately upon her arrival in the United States, Solana offers Luz the instant love and acceptance she has always craved. Solana talks easily with strangers and always smiles in appreciation toward others. According to Luz, this is Solana’s superpower. Luz is quick to realize she can learn a lot from Solana and soon cannot imagine life without her. In the same vein, how does Mr. Mac symbolize family and belonging to Luz and Solana? What about Skyler? What about Solana’s friends Mariana, Lorena, and Alicia? How does each character bring a sense of family and belonging to one another?

This guide was created by Esther H. Ra, Ed.D., M.A., lecturer on education, university career advisor, literacy specialist, and certified teacher.