

2026



LATINIDAD

in Schools

CURRICULUM RESOURCE GUIDES

NARRATIVES
OF LATINIDAD
IN NEW YORK CITY



Edmund W. Gordon Institute
for Advanced Study
Teachers College, Columbia University

THE LATINIDAD CURRICULUM INITIATIVE, EDMUND W. GORDON INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY



The Latinidad Curriculum Initiative (LCI) for New York City Public Schools is based at the Edmund W. Gordon Institute for Advanced Study at Teachers College, Columbia University and has been made possible by a generous grant from the New York City Council and in partnership with the United Way of New York City and the Hispanic Federation. Together, our overarching goal is to provide the opportunity for teachers, students, and communities served by New York City Public Schools to explore, celebrate, and expand their study of Latinidad across academic content areas and throughout grades K-12.

Team

Dr. Limarys Caraballo

Associate Professor
Teachers College, Columbia University

Dr. Regina Cortina

Professor
Teachers College, Columbia University

Dr. Ezekiel Dixon-Román

Professor and Director
Edmund W. Gordon Institute for Advanced Study
Teachers College, Columbia University

Dr. Amanda Earl

Visiting Assistant Professor of Teaching
Teachers College, Columbia University

Paola Heincke

Head of Operations and Strategic Initiatives
Edmund W. Gordon Institute for Advanced Study
Teachers College, Columbia University

Stephanie Latchman

Project Coordinator
Teachers College, Columbia University

Dr. Alicia Chatterjee

Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Teachers College, Columbia University

Dr. Nicole Sansone Ruiz

Senior Research Associate
Teachers College, Columbia University

Dr. Rachel Talbert

Assistant Research Professor
Teachers College, Columbia University

Jonathan Beltrán Alvarado

Katie Caster

Carolina Gomez

Sara Pan Algarra

Fabiola Quiñones

Sophia Vazquez

Shari Wejsa-Stewart

Doctoral Research Assistants
Teachers College, Columbia University

Kendal Peterman

Graduate Research Assistant
Teachers College, Columbia University

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE LATINIDAD CURRICULUM INITIATIVE AND ITS RELEVANCE,
TAKE A LOOK AT OUR STRATEGIC REPORT “THE NEED TO ADVANCE THE STUDY OF
LATINIDAD IN NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS” AND OUR CURRICULAR BLUEPRINT ON
OUR WEBSITE: <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/latinidadnycschools/>**

ABOUT THE LCI CURRICULUM RESOURCE GUIDES



The Latinidad Curriculum Initiative (LCI) for New York City Public Schools aims to enhance the quality of education by providing a dynamic, interdisciplinary curricular framework and lesson plans that celebrate Latinidad and its connection to the histories, accomplishments, and cultures of our City and nation. The resources provided through this initiative seek to help teachers recognize who their students are and to enable the study, active reflection upon, and celebration of the histories, cultures, and intellectual contributions of Latinas and Latinos, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the city we live in and the places we call home. A curriculum that enables the study of Latinidades and their multiple and ever-evolving forms is meant to enhance school experiences by providing children and youth of all backgrounds opportunities to celebrate where we come from, what we have achieved, and what we desire for our families, communities, city, country, and world in the future.

As part of our curriculum development, in the second year of our initiative we hosted a series of Knowledge Building and Curriculum Writing Workshops during the 2025-2026 school year. The knowledge building workshops invited scholars and topical experts to engage with New York City Public Schools educators and administrators around the concept of Latinidad. We held four of these workshops at Teachers College, Columbia University:

- **Centering Afro-Latinidad in New York City**, on October 9, 2025
- **Narratives of Latinidad in New York City**, on November 4, 2025
- **Sounds of Latinidad: Integrating Music and Arts Education into the K-12 Curriculum**, on January 13, 2026
- **Lessons for the Study and Celebration of Latinidad**, on March 12, 2026

During knowledge building sessions, educators discussed the dynamic and multidimensional aspects of Latinidad; reflected personally and professionally on their connection(s) to this concept; and brainstormed in conversation with workshop facilitators and each other around how to incorporate lessons and resources about Latinidad into their teaching practice. As an outcome of these workshops, the LCI has created an ongoing series of **Curriculum Resource Guides**, published on our website (<https://www.tc.columbia.edu/latinidadnycschools/>) and designed for New York City educators, that is meant to complement the lesson plans we are developing for New York City Public Schools. The first four guides, described below, highlight content from our knowledge building workshops. These Curriculum Resource Guides thus represent a collaborative effort and body of knowledge and, while not exhaustive, include valuable and reliable resources—including scholarly and fictional texts; primary source documents; music, film, and audiovisual content; and historical and conceptual contexts—that teachers aiming to address the overlooked histories, knowledges, and contributions of the various communities that make up Latinidad in K-12 classrooms will benefit from using. They address just a few of the many important topics, regions, and heritage and national identities of Latinidad in New York City; our aim is to publish more as our curriculum develops. Our first four guides cover the following topics:

- **Centering Afro-Latinidad in New York City**: This guide, authored by Yosef Medina and utilizing work done by the Afro-Latin@ Forum, offers a brief historical and conceptual background for understanding the importance of New York City as a main locus of Afro-Latinidad—including for intellectual, political, and artistic life and culture—in North America since colonial times. It also provides summaries of the interdisciplinary lesson plans within our larger curriculum prepared by Medina and his colleagues at the Afro-Latin@Forum that specifically address Afro-Latinidad, or the experience of descendancy from both the African as well as Latin American and Caribbean diasporas.



- **Teaching Dominican Histories:** Authored by Alexa Rodríguez, this guide provides lists of materials organized by school level—children’s books, novels, scholarly books, academic articles, city excursions, music, videos, documentaries, and websites—that could be used in the classroom or at home to teach about the history and ongoing contributions of Dominicans in New York City.
- **Latinidad in Sounds:** Integrating Music and Arts Education into the K-12 Curriculum: Priscila Santana wrote this resource for those interested in using a music-centered lens and applying sound as a medium for mapping histories, forging connections, and (re)collecting memories to enrich students’ engagement with the diverse cultural ecosystems of New York City. It includes specific recommendations of genres, songs, and artists to explore.
- **Narratives of Latinidad in New York City:** Eddie Rivero, a scholar of bilingual education, curated this guide which consists of a reading list, organized by grade level, of texts that can inform culturally responsive teaching across K-12 settings.

We would like to thank the experts who facilitated these workshops and authored the Curriculum Resource Guides, the educators who participated in these workshops and made suggestions for resources, and the New York City Council for providing funding to make these possible.

— LATINIDAD CURRICULUM INITIATIVE AT TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



Five Boro Story Project. (2021). *Micailhuittl: Día de Muertos* on 34th Av.

NARRATIVES OF LATINIDAD IN NEW YORK CITY



Author

Dr. Eddie Rivero

Visiting Assistant Professor, Bilingual/Bicultural Education, Teachers College, Columbia University

About the Author

Eddie Rivero, Ph.D., is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, in the Bilingual/ Bicultural Education program. Dr. Rivero's research is grounded in critical and sociocultural theories of learning and examines the tensions that emerge within sociotechnical systems, which can reproduce social inequities while also creating possibilities for youth and educators to envision and design more liberatory social futures. Following these lines of inquiry, Dr. Rivero's work examines how teachers and out-of-school educators can leverage the affordances of everyday technologies to support the development of literacies that are consequential to students' lives and the well-being of their communities. Drawing on participatory and social design-based experiments as methodologies, his work has shown how critical pedagogies can emerge when teachers learn from the ingenuity and relational agency that youth leverage to reimagine sociotechnical systems. Specifically, his publications have examined how educators can support youth to glitch and transform sociotechnical systems, reimagine virtual reality environments through transgressive play, and critique and redesign virtual ecologies in video games in ways that challenge hegemonic ideologies. Recent work has explored how educators can navigate tensions that emerge through the use of AI toward the development of culturally responsive pedagogies. Across these strands, Dr. Rivero's scholarship illuminates how the social imagination and everyday media practices of youth, when supported through equity-centered pedagogies, can support forms of world-making rooted in justice, sustainability, and the thriving of non-dominant communities.

Table of Contents

For Grades K to 5	1
For Grades 6 to 8	6
For Grades 9 to 12	8



NARRATIVES OF LATINIDAD IN NEW YORK CITY

This reading list was developed by Eddie Rivero, Visiting Assistant Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, to center narratives that reflect the diverse and dynamic experiences of Latinidad in NYC and to support curriculum design that affirms students' identities and builds on their lived experiences. It highlights authors whose work engages local Latinidad histories, cultural practices, and everyday life. Organized by grade level, the list offers educators developmentally appropriate texts that can inform culturally responsive teaching across K-12 settings. Rather than serving as an exhaustive catalog, this list is meant to serve as a jumping off point that each educator can adapt and add to. For availability of digital and audiobook content, check here: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learning/subjects/libraries>

For Grades K to 5



Estrellita en la ciudad grande/Estrellita in the Big City

Author: Samuel Caraballo

Illustrator: Pablo Torrecilla

Grade Level: K-3

Setting: Brooklyn and Manhattan, NY

Author's Background: Puerto Rican; born in Vieques, Puerto Rico

Description: A bilingual picture book where Estrellita, a young girl who has recently moved from Puerto Rico to NYC, shares her experiences and adventures in the big city with her grandmother during heartfelt phone conversations.



Mango, Abuela, and Me

Author: Meg Medina

Illustrator: Angela Dominguez

Grade Level: K-2

Setting: Urban US city (could be NYC)

Author's Background: Cuban descent

Description: Mia's Spanish-speaking grandmother moves in, and despite a language barrier, they bond by learning each other's languages and sharing stories.



Areli Is a Dreamer

Author: Areli Morales

Grade Level: Pre-K-3

Setting: NYC

Author's Background: Born in Puebla, Mexico and raised in the US

Description: This autobiographical picture book tells the story of Areli, who immigrated from Mexico and was raised in NYC.



Un trineo para Gabo/A Sled for Gabo

Author: Emma Otheguy

Illustrator: Ana Ramírez González

Grade Level: Pre-K-1

Setting: Unspecified town in the US

Author's Background: Cuban American author from NYC

Description: Gabo, a shy boy new to snowy weather, wishes to join the neighborhood kids sledding. With the help of his community, he experiences his first snowy adventure.



Islandborn

Author: Junot Díaz

Illustrator: Leo Espinosa

Grade Level: K-3

Setting: The Bronx, NY

Author's Background: Dominican American writer

Description: Lola, a young Dominican girl in the Bronx, embarks on a journey to rediscover her heritage and memories of the island she left behind.



The Storyteller's Candle/La velita de los cuentos

Author: Lucía González

Illustrator: Lulu Delacre

Grade Level: 2-5

Setting: El Barrio (East Harlem), NY

Author's Background: Cuban American children's author and librarian

Description: Set during the Great Depression, this story follows Pura Belpré, the first Puerto Rican librarian in NYC, as she brings the joy of storytelling to the community.



Mi Tierra/My Land

Author: Adria Quiñones

Illustrator: Minal Álvarez

Grade Level: K-3

Author's Background: Lifelong New Yorker of Puerto Rican and Spanish heritage

Description: Amaya Nuñez cherishes her unique name and her vibrant NYC neighborhood, highlighting the cultural richness of her community.



Alma y cómo obtuvo su nombre/Alma and How She Got Her Name

Author and Illustrator: Juana Martinez-Neal

Grade Level: K-2

Setting: Alma's family home in an unspecified location

Author's Background: Born in Lima, Peru, she incorporates Latin culture into her work.

Description: Alma learns about the rich history behind her long name, connecting with her family's heritage.



The Bronx is My Home

Author: Alyssa Reynoso-Morris

Illustrator: Kim Holt

Grade Level: Pre-K-2

Setting: The Bronx, NY

Author's Background: Afro-Latinx/e Dominican and Puerto Rican writer born and raised in the Bronx

Description: A celebration of the Bronx's vibrant culture, landmarks, and community through the eyes of a young resident.



Plátanos Are Love

Author: Alyssa Reynoso-Morris

Illustrator: Mariyah Rahman

Grade Level: K-3

Setting: Urban US setting, likely NYC

Author's Background: Afro-Latinx/e Dominican and Puerto Rican writer born and raised in the Bronx

Description: Esme learns about her Dominican heritage and family traditions through cooking plátanos with her abuela.



Abuela/Grandmother

Author: Arthur Dorros

Illustrator: Elisa Kleven

Grade Level: K-2

Setting: NYC

Author's Background: Born in Washington, D.C., this author often writes bilingual books in Spanish and English

Description: A young girl and her grandmother take a magical journey over NYC, exploring landmarks and sharing cultural stories.

 **Frizzy**

Author: Claribel A. Ortega

Grade Level: 3-7

Setting: Urban US (could be NYC)

Author's Background: Dominican American

Description: A middle-grade graphic novel about Marlene, a young Dominican girl who embraces her natural curls while pushing back against imposed beauty standards.

 Grandma's Gift

Author and Illustrator: Eric Velasquez

Grade Level: Pre-K-3

Setting: Spanish Harlem, NY

Author's Background: Afro-Puerto Rican; born in Spanish Harlem

Description: An autobiographical picture book about Eric who spends the Christmas holiday with his grandmother. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a Diego Velázquez painting sparks his imagination and his grandmother's gift affirms his emerging identity as an artist.

 Turning Pages: My Life Story

Author: Sonia Sotomayor

Illustrator: Lulu Delacre

Grade Level: Pre-K-3

Setting: The Bronx, NY and Puerto Rico

Author's Background: Nuyorican (born in the Bronx to Puerto Rican parents)

Description: A picture book memoir in which Sotomayor recounts how books shaped her childhood and sense of possibility. She describes reading as a source of connection across family in NY and Puerto Rico and as support through personal and family challenges.

 I Love Saturdays y Domingos

Author: Alma Flor Ada

Illustrator: Elivia Savadier

Grade Level: K-3

Setting: Centered on a child's home and her grandparents' homes

Author's Background: Cuban American

Description: A bilingual picture book in which a young girl spends Saturdays with her English-speaking grandmother and Sundays with her Spanish-speaking grandparents. The story highlights the bilingual everyday cultural practices that shape a child's identity across family contexts.



The Cot in the Living Room

Author: Hilda Eunice Burgos

Illustrator: Gaby D' Alessandro

Grade Level: Pre-K-3

Setting: Washington Heights, NY

Author's Background: Dominican American from NYC

Description: A young Dominican American girl envies the children who sleep on the living-room cot while their caregivers work night shifts. When she finally sleeps there herself, she recognizes the cot as a marker of others' hardship and learns empathy.



Caravan to the North: Misael's Long Walk

Author: Jorge Argueta

Illustrator: Manuel Monroy

Grade Level: 4-6

Setting: El Salvador to Tijuana, along the route of a migrant caravan toward the US border

Author's Background: Nahua Pipil from El Salvador

Description: A verse novel narrated by Misael, a nine-year-old Salvadoran boy traveling with his family in a migrant caravan north. Through brief poems, he conveys the reasons for leaving and the mutual care that sustains people as they reach Tijuana and confront a closing border.



For Grades 6 to 8

 *Isla to Island*

Author: Alexis Castellanos

Grade level: 5-8

Setting: Brooklyn, NY

Author's Background: Born and raised in Miami, Florida

Description: This wordless graphic novel tells the story of Marisol, a young girl sent from Cuba to Brooklyn during the 1960s as part of Operation Peter Pan. The illustrations vividly depict her emotional journey adapting to a new culture and environment.

 Ana María Reyes Does Not Live in a Castle

Author: Hilda Eunice Burgos

Grade Level: 5-8

Setting: Washington Heights, NY

Author's Background: Dominican American; born and raised in NYC

Description: Ana María navigates life in a cramped apartment with her Dominican family. She aspires to attend a prestigious private school and must excel in a citywide piano competition, all while dealing with family dynamics and a trip to the Dominican Republic.

 Big Apple Diaries

Author and Illustrator: Alyssa Bermudez

Grade Level: 5-8

Setting: NYC (2000-2001)

Author's Background: Puerto Rican American; based in NYC

Description: A graphic memoir capturing Alyssa's experiences as a middle schooler in NYC during 2001, including the events of 9/11, family dynamics, and personal growth.

 Miss Quinces

Author and Illustrator: Kat Fajardo

Grade Level: 5-8

Setting: NYC and Honduras

Author's Background: Colombian-Honduran American; born in NYC

Description: Sue, a comic-loving Latina from NYC, is forced to spend the summer in Honduras with her family, where she confronts cultural expectations and prepares for a quinceañera she does not want.



La Borinqueña (Graphic Novel)

Author: Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez

Grade Level: 6-9

Setting: NYC and Puerto Rico

Author's Background: Puerto Rican American; based in NYC

Description: Marisol Rios De La Luz, a Columbia University student, gains superpowers connected to Puerto Rican heritage and becomes La Borinqueña, a symbol of Puerto Rican pride and activism.



Esperanza Rising

Author: Pam Muñoz Ryan

Illustrator: Joe Cepeda (cover art)

Grade Level: 6-7

Setting: Aguascalientes and California during the United States Great Depression

Author's Background: Mexican heritage; California

Description: After a family tragedy, Esperanza and her mother flee Mexico and rebuild their lives in California's farm labor camps during the Great Depression.



El Bronx Remembered: A Novella and Stories

Author: Nicholasa Mohr

Grade Level: 8-9

Setting: The South Bronx, NY

Author's Background: Puerto Rican descent; Nuyorican

Description: A novella plus short stories that portray everyday life in El Bronx through the perspectives of Puerto Rican children and families.



For Grades 9 to 12



The Way It Was and Other Writings

Author: Jesús Colón

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: NYC (primarily Brooklyn), early to mid-20th century

Author's Background: Afro-Puerto Rican writer and activist; born in Cayey, Puerto Rico; immigrated to NYC in 1917; known as the “Father of the Nuyorican movement”

Description: A collection of autobiographical essays reflecting on the experiences of Puerto Rican immigrants in NYC, highlighting themes of racial identity, labor struggles, and community resilience.



Body Bee Calling from the 21st Century

Author: Miguel Algarín

Grade Level: 11-12

Setting: Futuristic and urban landscapes, reflecting NYC and imagined 21st-century environments

Author's Background: Puerto Rican American; born in Santurce, Puerto Rico; co-founder of the Nuyorican Poets Café; professor at Rutgers University

Description: A collection of experimental poetry blending Afro-Caribbean rhythms, urban vernacular, and futuristic themes, exploring identity and transformation in a bionic 21st century.



When Love Was Reels: Poetry

Author: José B. González

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: El Salvador and NYC

Author's Background: Born in San Salvador, El Salvador; immigrated to the US at age 8; professor of English at the US Coast Guard Academy

Description: A collection of narrative poems tracing a boy's journey from El Salvador to NYC, using iconic Latin American films and TV shows to explore identity, migration, and cultural memory.



A Matter of Pride and Other Stories

Author: Nicholasa Mohr

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: NYC and the Caribbean

Author's Background: Puerto Rican American writer born in NYC's El Barrio (East Harlem); renowned for her works that depict the experiences of Puerto Rican women in urban settings

Description: A collection of seven short stories highlighting the lives of Puerto Rican women, exploring themes of identity, resilience, and cultural heritage.



Simpson Street and Other Plays

Author: Edward Gallardo

Grade Level: 11-12

Setting: NYC, primarily the Bronx

Author's Background: Puerto Rican American playwright whose works focus on the experiences of working-class Puerto Ricans in NYC

Description: A collection of three full-length plays, *Waltz on a Merry-Go-Round* (1975), *Simpson Street* (1979), and *Women Without Men* (1985) that explore the lives, struggles, and resilience of working-class Puerto Ricans in NYC.



Juliet Takes a Breath

Author: Gabby Rivera

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Bronx, NY and Portland, OR

Author's Background: Puerto Rican American; born in the Bronx

Description: A queer coming-of-age story about Juliet, a Puerto Rican teen, who explores her identity and feminism during an internship outside of NYC.



I'm a Wild Seed

Author: Sharon Lee De La Cruz

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: NYC

Author's Background: Afro-Latinx, queer; born and raised in NYC

Description: A graphic memoir exploring queerness, race, and identity through autobiographical comics centered on the author's life in NYC.



Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass

Author: Meg Medina

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Queens, NY

Author's Background: Cuban American; based in Virginia

Description: Piddy Sanchez, a Latina teen in Queens, faces bullying and explores cultural identity and resilience in this powerful novel.



House on Mango Street

Author: Sandra Cisneros

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Chicago

Author's Background: Mexican American writer born in Chicago

Description: *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros is a coming-of-age story told through short vignettes. It follows Esperanza, a Chicana girl in Chicago, as she navigates her identity, culture, and dreams of a better life. The book explores themes of gender, community, and the desire for independence.



American Street

Author: Ibi Zoboi

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Detroit

Author's Background: Haitian American

Description: The novel is about Fabiola, who was born in Detroit but raised in Haiti for most of her life. After migrating back to the US, her mother is detained by ICE, leaving Fabiola to live with her Americanized cousins on the west side of Detroit. Fabiola is confronted with an obstacle that compromises her freedom and challenges her to balance her faith and cultural clashes.



Love in English

Author: Maria E. Andreu

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: New Jersey

Author's Background: Argentinian American

Description: Ana is a 16-year-old who recently migrated from Argentina to New Jersey to reunite with her father following a three-year separation. At first, she is reluctant to adjust to her new life, but soon finds new friends and even love interests in her English class. Ana explores her feelings through her poetry, where she begins her self-discovery journey.



Ysrael (from Drown)

Author: Junot Diaz

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: The Dominican Republic

Author's Background: Dominican, Afro-Caribbean

Description: Told from the perspective of a Dominican boy, the story follows the narrator and his brother as they encounter a disfigured boy named Ysrael, weaving themes of cruelty, longing, and the formation of identity.



You Sound Like a White Girl: The Case for Rejecting Assimilation

Author: Julissa Arce

Grade Level: 7-12

Setting: US and Mexico

Author's Background: Mexican American, immigrated from Mexico at age 11

Description: A memoir against assimilation as a racialized demand for proximity to whiteness. Arce blends personal experience with historical narratives to show how assimilation pressures immigrant communities to suppress their language and cultural practices.



In the Country We Love: My Family Divided

Author(s): Diane Guerrero & Michelle Burford

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Boston and Colombia

Author's Background: Colombian American

Description: A memoir recounting how Guerrero's parents were deported when she was fourteen. The memoir draws on her personal narrative with reflection on US immigration enforcement.



Plantains and Our Becoming

Author: Melania Luisa Marte

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Movement across NYC, Texas, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti

Author's Background: Dominican American; NYC

Description: A poetry collection that examines the intertwined histories of the Dominican Republic and Haiti to center Black diasporic life. The collection draws on ancestral knowledge to challenge stereotypes and offer a joyful vision of Black identity and personhood.



Solito: A Memoir

Author: Javier Zamora

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: El Salvador to the US via Guatemala and Mexico

Author's Background: Salvadoran American

Description: A memoir of a nine-year-old's unaccompanied migration to reunite with his parents. The story highlights the risks and the care that emerges through encounters with strangers on his journey north.



How the García Girls Lost Their Accents

Author: Julia Alvarez

Grade Level: 9-12

Author's Background: Dominican American

Description: Chronicles the García sisters' migration from the Dominican Republic to the US and their experiences straddling two cultures.



The Crazy Bunch

Author: Willie Perdomo

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: East Harlem

Author's Background: Puerto Rican, Nuyorican

Description: Set over one transformative weekend in El Barrio (East Harlem), this verse novel follows a tight-knit group of Afro-Puerto Rican friends known as 'The Crazy Bunch.' As they navigate grief, street violence, love, and loyalty, the story offers a raw and poetic portrayal of urban youth culture, memory, and the resilience of community.



Clap When You Land

Author: Elizabeth Acevedo

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: The Dominican Republic and NYC

Author's Background: Dominican American; NYC

Description: This is the story of two half-sisters, Camino and Yahaira Rios, who learn of each other after the sudden death of their father in a plane crash heading to the Dominican Republic. The half-sisters are vastly different in skin complexion and talent. Yahira a chess champion, and Camino, a swimmer and healer in the making. It is through their loss and uncovering of lies that the half-sisters build a bond.



Ander and Santi Were Here

Author: Jonny Garza Villa

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: San Antonio, Texas

Author's Background: Mexican descent, born in Texas

Description: This story follows a nonbinary Mexican teen, Ander Martinez, living in San Antonio, Texas. They are taking a gap year to prepare for college and focus on their mural art. Ander's parents own a restaurant, and a recent new hire, Santi, has caught Ander's attention. In their growing romantic relationship, ICE agents come after Santi, who is undocumented. This novel explores themes of love, identity, and the fragility of "home" through an artistic perspective.



To Julia de Burgos/A Julia de Burgos

Author: Julia de Burgos

Grade Level: 9-12

Author's Background: Puerto Rican

Description: A dramatic monologue where the poet addresses her public self and private self, critiquing societal expectations of women and colonial subjectivity.



Rio Grande de Loíza

Author: Julia de Burgos

Grade Level: 9-12

Author's Background: Puerto Rican

Description: A lyrical invocation of the Loíza River, symbolizing ancestral connection, history, and mourning for Puerto Rico's colonization and loss.



Labyrinth Lost

Author: Zoraida Córdova

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Brooklyn, NY

Author's Background: Ecuadorian American

Description: Alex, a bruja from Brooklyn, rejects her magical lineage and accidentally sends her family to another realm. She must reclaim her power to save them.



Those Who Don't

Author: Sandra Cisneros

Grade Level: 9-12

Author's Background: Mexican American writer born in Chicago

Description: A brief vignette that reflects on how Latinx communities are perceived by outsiders and how they perceive themselves. It critiques stereotypes and offers a glimpse into neighborhood dynamics.



Wildwood (excerpt from The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao)

Author: Junot Diaz

Grade Level: 9-12

Author's Background: Dominican, Afro-Caribbean

Description: Follows Lola, a Dominican American girl navigating her relationship with her mother, cultural identity, and coming of age in the US and Dominican Republic.



Little Things are Big

Author: Jesus Colón

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: NYC

Author's Background: Puerto Rican writer

Description: Colón reflects on a moment when he hesitated to help a white woman late at night, exploring the internal conflict shaped by his identity as a Black Puerto Rican immigrant in NYC.



When I was Puerto Rican

Author: Esmeralda Santiago

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Puerto Rico and NYC

Author's Background: Puerto Rican

Description: This coming-of-age memoir traces Santiago's childhood in Puerto Rico and her migration to NYC, detailing her struggles with language and adapting to a new environment as a Puerto Rican girl.



Gabi, a Girl in Pieces

Author: Isabel Quintero

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Southern California

Author's Background: California, daughter of Mexican immigrants

Description: Told through journal entries, Gabi's story explores her experiences as a Mexican American teen navigating family pressures, cultural expectations, and her voice and identity.



I Want to Be Miss America

Author: Julia Alvarez

Grade Level: 9-12

Author's Background: Dominican American

Description: Alvarez reflects on her experiences as a Dominican immigrant and how her family interpreted American culture through TV and beauty pageants. It reveals internalized racism and the longing to fit in.



Se Habla Español

Author: Tanya Maria Barrientos

Grade Level: 9-12

Author's Background: Guatemalan American

Description: Barrientos reflects on growing up distanced from her Spanish language and Guatemalan heritage to assimilate. As an adult, she begins reclaiming her identity and reconnecting with her roots through language.



Evening on the Lawn

Author: Gary Soto

Grade Level: 9-12

Author's Background: Mexican American

Description: A reflective poem that draws on sensory memory and cultural moments from a Chicanx neighborhood, highlighting family life and fleeting beauty.



Show and Prove

Author: Sofia Quintero

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: The Bronx, NY

Author's Background: Puerto Rican-Dominican, born in the Bronx

Description: Two boys navigate love, identity, and their friendship during a pivotal summer in the Bronx. The story is grounded in 1980s hip hop and cultural shifts.



Hunger for Memory

Author: Richard Rodriguez

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: California

Author's Background: Mexican American

Description: Rodriguez reflects on growing up as a Mexican American navigating the US education system, the loss of Spanish in his home, and the cost of assimilation into white middle-class culture.



Shadowshaper

Author: Daniel José Older

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: NYC

Author's Background: Born in Cambridge, MA; son of Cuban immigrant

Description: Afro-Boricua teen Sierra Santiago learns she is part of a legacy of shadowshapers who infuse ancestral spirits into art. She must save her community from a sinister threat.



Before We Were Free

Author: Julia Alvarez

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: The Dominican Republic

Author's Background: Dominican American

Description: A 12-year-old girl comes of age during the final days of Trujillo's dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. Her family's political resistance leads to exile.



Let it Rain Coffee

Author: Angie Cruz

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: New York and the Dominican Republic

Author's Background: Dominican American and born in Washington Heights, NYC

Description: Traces the lives of a Dominican family in Washington Heights across generations, exploring cultural memory and economic struggle.



Dominicana

Author: Angie Cruz

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: New York and the Dominican Republic

Author's Background: Dominican American and born in Washington Heights, NYC

Description: A 15-year-old Dominican girl is married off and brought to NYC, where she navigates isolation, cultural displacement, and womanhood. Based on the author's mother's story.



Bodega Dreams

Author: Ernesto Quiñonez

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Spanish Harlem, NY

Author's Background: Ecuadorian Puerto Rican novelist

Description: In Spanish Harlem, a young narrator is drawn into the world of Willie Bodega, a power broker with dreams of uplifting the Latinx community.



Táina

Author: Ernesto Quiñonez

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Spanish Harlem, NY

Author's Background: Ecuadorian Puerto Rican novelist

Description: A teen boy becomes obsessed with a local girl rumored to be a virgin carrying a miracle. Explores Nuyorican life, faith, and coming of age.



The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love

Author: Oscar Hijuelos

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: 1950s NYC

Author's Background: Cuban American novelist born in Morningside Heights, NYC

Description: Set in 1950s NYC, this novel explores the Cuban immigrant experience through two brothers pursuing musical fame, blending nostalgia, longing, and the cultural legacy of mambo music.



The Education of Margot Sánchez

Author: Lilliam Rivera

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: South Bronx, NY

Author's Background: Born in Bronx, NY

Description: Follows a Puerto Rican teen from the Bronx navigating identity, cultural pressure, and gentrification while working at her family's grocery store as punishment for misusing her father's credit card.



Dealing in Dreams

Author: Lilliam Rivera

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Fictional "Mega City"

Author's Background: Born in Bronx, NYC

Description: In a dystopian matriarchal society, a Latinx teen girl gang leader must confront power, loyalty, and systemic control. Set in a fictional future.



With the Fire on High

Author: Elizabeth Acevedo

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Philadelphia

Author's Background: Dominican American; NYC

Description: Emoni, an Afro-Latina (Puerto Rican and Dominican) teen mom and aspiring chef, finds her path while navigating school, work, and family responsibility.



The Poet X

Author: Elizabeth Acevedo

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: NYC

Author's Background: Dominican American; NYC

Description: A Dominican teen in Harlem finds her voice through slam poetry while challenging cultural and religious expectations.



I am Alfonso Jones

Author: Tony Medina

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: NYC

Author's Background: Afro-Latino writer born in the South Bronx, NY

Description: The story follows Alfonso Jones, an African American teenager excited to play Hamlet in his school's hip-hop rendition of the play. While shopping for his first suit, an off-duty police officer mistakes a clothes hanger for a gun and fatally shoots him. In the afterlife, Alfonso boards a ghost train guided by victims of police shootings, who help him understand this new spiritual realm. Meanwhile, his family and friends grapple with grief and seek justice. The narrative incorporates real-life victims of police violence, emphasizing systemic racism and the quest for justice.



Intergalactic Travels: Poems from a Fugitive Alien

Author: Alan Pelaez Lopez

Grade Level: 9-12

Author's Background: Afro-Zapotec writer and artist from Oaxaca, Mexico

Description: This genre-defying poetry collection blends speculative sci-fi, Afro-Indigenous epistemologies, and poetic resistance from an undocumented, trans, nonbinary perspective.



Rebellion is the Circle of a Lover's Hand

Author: Martín Espada

Grade Level: 9-12

Author's Background: Puerto Rican American poet born in NYC

Description: This poetry collection captures Espada's Puerto Rican heritage, political resistance, working-class struggle, and love.



Down These Mean Streets

Author: Piri Thomas

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Spanish Harlem, NY

Author's Background: Puerto Rican Cuban descent; born and raised in Spanish Harlem, NY

Description: A memoir about growing up Afro-Puerto Rican in Spanish Harlem, grappling with identity, crime, and survival.



Smoking Lovely

Author: Willie Perdomo

Grade Level: 9-12

Author's Background: Puerto Rican writer born in NYC

Description: An intimate portrait of addiction and recovery in East Harlem, infused with Puerto Rican identity and cultural survival.



The Motorcycle Diaries

Author: Ernesto "Che" Guevara

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Various locations across South America

Author's Background: Revolutionary leader from Argentina

Description: A memoir chronicling Guevara's motorcycle journey across South America as a young man. The narrative explores social inequality, Indigenous communities, and the beginnings of his revolutionary ideology. humanity within the US prison system.



Short Eyes

Author: Miguel Piñero

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: A New York City detention center

Author's Background: Puerto Rican playwright

Description: A prison drama written by a formerly incarcerated Puerto Rican playwright, it exposes the brutality and humanity within the US prison system.



Nostalgia and Borders

Author: Sonia Guiñansaca

Grade Level: 9-12

Author's Background: Born in Ecuador, raised in Harlem

Description: This poetry collection includes themes of non-binary identity and Indigenous identity, ancestral connection, multilingualism, and memory, using reflections from Sonia Guiñansaca's own experiences as an undocumented immigrant from Ecuador, navigating what home means to them, as a queer Indigenous person.



Puerto Rican Obituary

Author: Pedro Pietri

Grade Level: 9-12

Author's Background: Puerto Rican American; moved to NYC at age 3

Description: Iconic poem honoring the lives of working-class Puerto Ricans in NYC, combining satire and rage to critique the American Dream.



Neruda on the Park

Author: Cleyvis Natera

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: NYC

Author's Background: Dominican American

Description: A Dominican American mother and daughter navigate love, loss, and gentrification in a rapidly changing NYC neighborhood.



Beautiful Maria of My Soul

Author: Oscar Hijuelos

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: 1940s and 50s Havana, Cuba and Miami, Florida

Author's Background: Cuban American novelist born in Morningside Heights, NY

Description: Tells the story of Maria, muse of the Mambo Kings, capturing the immigrant experience and the sacrifices of love and legacy in NYC's Latin music scene.



Family Lore

Author: Elizabeth Acevedo

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Dominican Republic and NYC

Author's Background: Dominican American; NYC

Description: Told through multiple generations of Dominican women, the novel explores family secrets and inherited gifts, blending magic with emotional realism.



Almost a Woman

Author: Esmeralda Santiago

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: NYC

Author's Background: Puerto Rican

Description: Santiago recounts her teen years in NYC as she transitions from Puerto Rico, highlighting cultural conflicts, womanhood, and resilience.



In the Time of the Butterflies

Author: Julia Alvarez

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: The Dominican Republic

Author's Background: Dominican American

Description: Fictionalized account of the Mirabal sisters' resistance to Trujillo's regime. Centers Dominican women's political resistance.



Author: Julia Alvarez

Grade Level: 9-12

Setting: Rural Vermont

Author's Background: Dominican American

Description: This novel centers on Antonia Vega, a retired English professor and immigrant from the Dominican Republic who is grieving the sudden death of her husband. Simultaneously, she experiences other life-changing events: the disappearance of her unstable sister, reuniting a friend with their stranded undocumented fiancé in Colorado, and the arrival of an undocumented pregnant teenager at her doorstep.



Five Boro Story Project. (2021). *Micailhuitl: Día de Muertos* on 34th Av.



Amanda Earl. (2024).



**Edmund W. Gordon Institute
for Advanced Study**
Teachers College, Columbia University