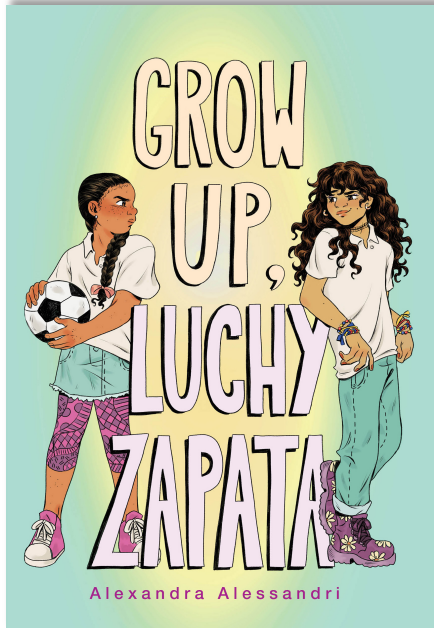


Reading Group Guide

Grow Up, Luchy Zapata

By Alexandra Alessandri



About the Book

Luchy Zapata is thrilled to finally attend the same school as her two best friends, Cami and Mateo. Middle school will be a piece of cake with them at her side, and she can explore her art and play soccer! But after Cami returns to Miami from visiting family in Colombia, she seems different, taking every opportunity to urge Luchy and Mateo to reinvent themselves. With every criticism, Luchy's anxieties about not being cool, not having a connection to her Colombian roots, and losing her BFF build into a tangled mess. Will her plan to remind Cami of their amazing friendship work, or is this change completely out of her control?

Discussion Questions

1. Mateo, Cami, and Luchy have unique nicknames for each other. Do you have a special nickname? What's the story behind it? Share with a partner or the class the story of your nickname.
2. Luchy complains about the times her parents have decided she was "too young" for something. (Chapter two) Was there a time when your parents or another grown-up claimed you were too young to do something? What was the thing you were too young to do, and how did it make you feel? What could have been better instead?
3. Luchy is scared her friendship with Cami is slipping away, and she is hurt by Cami's words and actions after her return from Colombia. Do you think Cami is hurting Luchy on purpose? Why or why not? How would you react if you were in Luchy's situation? Have you ever experienced a friendship breakup like in the book?
4. What are some of the signs that Cami is struggling with something outside of school? Find examples in the book.
5. Cami criticizes Luchy for her colorful leggings and Mateo for his Spiderman backpack. Why is it so important to Cami how others will see her and her friends? Who do you relate to the most during that conversation: Cami, Mateo, or Luchy? Do you think Cami is justified in feeling this way about her friends and their appearances? Why or why not?
6. When Luchy looks through her mami's scrapbook, she notices the memories her mami built when visiting Colombia. Luchy has never visited and does not have family nearby. She wonders what her life could have been like or who she could be if she was more connected to her mother's country. Can you relate to her

experience? Have you ever wondered about how different your life could be “if only”? Discuss with a partner.

7. Why did Mateo’s family keep his grandma’s health a secret from him? Debate in groups why his family felt this was a good plan versus why it might not have been fair to Mateo.

8. One way the novel depicts Cami and Luchy growing up at different rates is how Cami is already interested in boys. When playing soccer at the park, Diego asks Mateo and Luchy if they are dating. Do you think that having a crush, or romantic interest in a person, means growing up? Why is it so common to assume that a boy and girl cannot just be friends? How do you define “growing up”? How does the book discuss other ways to grow up?

9. Abui and Luchy’s mom seem to have endless wisdom to share. Find examples of this in the text. Describe someone in your life that acts like this, an elder that always has answers to every question, even the ones you don’t ask!

10. When Luchy tries to change for Cami, she puts on makeup and feels like a clown. She tries to say the word in Spanish (payaso), and it doesn’t feel right either. (Chapter eleven) How does this scene show the different ways Luchy struggles to fit in?

11. Luchy is upset that her papi seems to always focus on the negative. What are other examples in the text where characters focus on the negative? How does this hurt them? What are other ways to give feedback or motivate people to do better?

12. Cami says, “‘Things change, Luchy. They always do. The sooner you realize that, the less heartache you’ll have.’” (Chapter fourteen) Share your reaction to this statement.

13. Give examples from the book that describe why Luchy does not feel connected to her Colombian heritage. Why is she upset that Cami is closer to her Colombian roots than she is? Why is cultural heritage important?

14. Why is Luchy able to remain close with Mateo when Cami begins to distance herself? Why does Cami continue to talk to Mateo? What is the difference between each one of them? Do you think Cami and Luchy face more pressure because they are girls? Use examples from the text and your own experiences to answer.

15. Johanna and Luchy bond over the shared experience of losing a friendship they valued. At the end of the book, you learn why Cami acted the way she did. Do you think there is an explanation for Melissa’s behavior? Explain.

16. After Luchy steals Cami’s homework, she guiltily wonders, “Why does getting even feel so wrong?” (Chapter eighteen) What would you tell her?

17. Luchy reflects on how her feud with Cami got out of control and on what she “could’ve, should’ve, would’ve” done. (Chapter twenty-eight) As a class, discuss how the story would have changed if Luchy had known about Cami’s struggles.

18. Cami explains to Luchy why she wanted to reinvent herself and how it was so hard to go down memory lane. Does this excuse Cami’s behavior toward Luchy? Explain.

19. Using examples from the book, what are some ways that Luchy grows over the course of the story?

20. At the end of the book, Luchy and Cami seem to forgive each other, but do you think they will ever be friends again? Or have they truly grown apart? Explain your answer.

Extension Activities

1. Throughout the story, Cami makes statements about what is and isn't cool. Take five minutes to make two lists about your school: things that are "cool" and "not cool." Then compare the lists as a class. Have a discussion with the following questions:

- a. Who decides what is and is not cool? How are these messages shared?
- b. Does being cool matter? Explain your answer.
- c. How do these decisions make you and your classmates feel, and how do they impact your lives?

2. When Luchy is assigned Gabriel García Márquez as the Latine figure for her Hispanic Heritage Month Extravaganza assignment, she is annoyed to get another reminder of her "so-called roots." Ultimately, the project helps her build a connection to her cultural heritage. Choose an important figure who shares a cultural identity with you, and complete one of the following activities:

- a. Create a portrait of the figure like Luchy and Mateo did in the book.
- b. Write an essay about the figure and what you learned about them and yourself.
- c. Make a three-minute informational video or presentation about the figure.

3. Luchy and Mateo place great care into creating a scrapbook for Cami to remember their special friendship and core memories together. Choose a favorite memory you would love to look back on in ten years and create a scrapbook page about it. You can make a physical scrapbook page or a digital one. Be prepared to share with the class.

4. Abui tells Luchy and Mateo about her favorite author, Gabriel García Márquez, calling him the father of magical realism. Magic realism is defined by Britannica as a "narrative strategy that is characterized by the matter-of-fact inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction." (<https://www.britannica.com/art/magic-realism>) Choose a scene from the book and rewrite it from a magical realism perspective.

5. Mami explains to Luchy why she and Luchy's papi did not end up teaching Luchy Spanish, saying, "'But as adults, our dominant language is English—professionally, socially, even at home. So much so that often, I find myself having to translate the Spanish in my head before I speak it.'" (Chapter twenty-seven) Find a trusted adult who speaks at least two languages and interview them about their dominant language and their relationship to the different languages they speak. Ask how and why they learned another language. Write about what you learned from them and reflect on your own experiences.

Guide written by Cynthia Medrano, Librarian at the Highland Park Public Library.

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