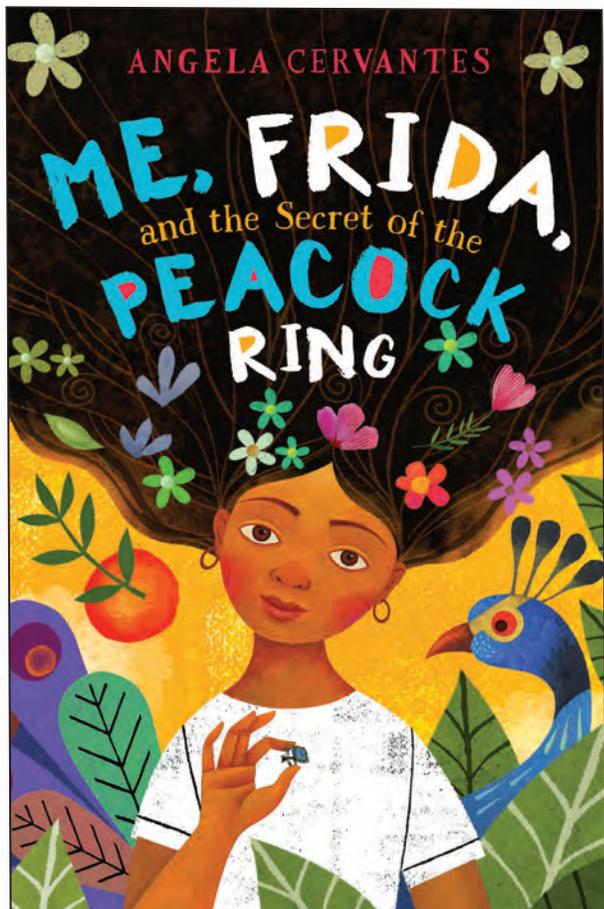


Grades
3-7

DISCUSSION GUIDE



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ME, FRIDA, and the Secret of the PEACOCK RING

By Angela Cervantes



“A perfect introduction to the mystery genre.”

—*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

“A rich exploration of the art of Frida Kahlo.”

—*School Library Journal*

“A fun read for any sleuths-in-training.”—*Kirkus*



PALOMA MARQUEZ IS TRAVELING to Mexico City, birthplace of her deceased father, for the very first time. She's hoping that spending some time in Mexico will help her unlock memories of the too-brief time they spent together.

While in Mexico, Paloma meets Lizzie and Gael, who present her with an irresistible challenge: The twin siblings want her to help them find a valuable ring that once belonged to beloved Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. What better way to honor her father than returning a priceless piece of jewelry that once belonged to his favorite artist?

But the twins have a secret. Do they really want the ring, or are they after something else entirely?

The colors, sights, and sounds of Mexico are infused throughout this engaging mystery. Students in grades 3–7 will also discover much about the art and life of Frida Kahlo as they enjoy the novel.

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 SCHOLASTIC

The Common Core State Standards addressed by the discussion questions and activities in this guide are listed below. For more information on the Common Core, visit corestandards.org. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1-7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3-7.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.3.5.B-7.5.B; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.1-7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2-7.2

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



-  Paloma begins her summer in Mexico by practicing the following phrases in Spanish: *no quiero*, *no puedo* and *no me gusta*. What does Paloma's choice of Spanish phrases reveal about her feelings toward a summer in Mexico?
-  While waiting for someone from the university to pick them up at the airport, Paloma is struck by a poster featuring a portrait of a woman. Describe the poster and Paloma's reaction to it. Why is the poster significant to Paloma and her mother's trip to Mexico?
-  Paloma's mom has another reason besides her work at the university for Paloma to join her in Mexico. How does the university and Professor Breton fit into her plan for Paloma's summer?
-  Paloma and her mother attend a party at Casa Azul, Frida Kahlo's home in Coyoacán, the first night the two are in Mexico. Paloma meets a boy her age named Tavo. Describe how Tavo introduces the art and life of Frida Kahlo to an initially indifferent Paloma and how Paloma's attitude changes over the course of her discussion with Tavo.
-  Paloma's mom introduces Paloma to two more young people at the party at Casa Azul. Who are Gael and Lizzie Castillo, and how do they fit into Paloma's stay in Coyoacán?
-  Frida Kahlo comes to Paloma in a dream after the party at Casa Azul. In the dream, Frida tells Paloma, "It's true that I am missing something . . . But you're missing something, too, Paloma." How do Frida's words foreshadow what is to come in the novel?
-  Gael and Lizzie share with Paloma that "The mystery begins in 1954. The year Frida Kahlo died." What is the importance of the peacock ring, and why do Gael and Lizzie want to find Frida's missing jewelry?
-  Paloma has another significant ring in her life. Describe why the red opal ring is so important to Paloma and to her mother.
-  A fortune teller appears throughout the story selling jewelry and offering to tell people's futures. She claims to speak many languages and to have traveled the world. Paloma is suspicious of the fortune teller at first and is unsure of the fortune teller's motives. How does the character of the fortune teller change over the course of the story?
-  A small room where Diego Rivera hid many of Frida's treasures after she died, a locked door, and Mr. Farill all play a role in the mystery that Paloma and her friends are trying to solve. Why do Paloma, Gael, and Lizzie decide to visit Casa Azul at midnight, and what happens to them once they arrive at Frida Kahlo's house?
-  The mystery intensifies with the introduction of the Trench Coat Man and a menacing black car that seems to follow Paloma wherever she goes. Paloma is uncertain about how these figures fit with the mystery. She also begins to question the motives of Gael and Lizzie. What is revealed about Gael and Lizzie's father and the kids' true reason for wanting to locate the peacock ring?
-  Paloma discusses the robbery at Casa Azul with Mr. Farill and then learns more about the theft and the thief from Gael and Lizzie. How do the two versions presented by the kids and Mr. Farill differ? How does this new information change the way Paloma and her friends try to solve the mystery of the missing peacock ring?
-  What is the significance of the gold cuff link? What role does it play in the events at the masquerade party at Casa Azul?
-  A fan of the mystery books featuring detective Lulu Pennywhistle, Paloma is inspired by one of Lulu's tactics to catch a culprit. What does Paloma do to confuse Mr. Farill and to get him to confess the night of the masquerade party? What are the other parts of her plan to make sure the real thief of the peacock ring is caught?
-  Not everyone in *Me, Frida, and the Secret of the Peacock Ring* is who they initially appear to be. Paloma discovers that Mr. Farill, Gael, and Lizzie all have hidden motives. Paloma is also surprised to find out the true identities of the fortune teller and the Trench Coat Man. What role do the fortune teller and the Trench Coat Man play in solving the mystery?
-  Paloma reluctantly joined her mom in Mexico for the summer. She was upset about missing out on summer activities with her friends in Kansas. How does Paloma's attitude change over the course of the story? What lessons does she learn about friendship? How does her relationship with her mother change?

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

 Paloma is a collector of memories. She records memories her mother shares about her father on notecards which she stores in her memory box. The memory box, a gift from her mother, is just a cardboard box that Paloma has decorated with purple paint and butterflies. Though the box is made from simple materials, it is one of Paloma's most precious possessions. Memories recorded on notecards and photographs of her father provide clues about a dad she never really knew. Select a person who is important in your life to interview. Prepare questions for your selected person to answer about his/her past. Record the answers to your questions on notecards. Create a memory box like Paloma's by decorating a shoebox to store your notecards and to preserve the important memories of your selected person's life.

 There can be many challenges when faced with learning a new language. Parts of speech and the order of words in sentences may differ from your native tongue. In addition, every language has slang—informal vocabulary commonly used in conversation. Early in her Spanish tutorials with Gael and Lizzie, Paloma introduces her friends to the phrase “cray-cray”—slang for “crazy.” Pretend that you are Paloma and you are going to instruct Gael and Lizzie about slang in English. Make a list of slang words and phrases commonly used in English. Arrange the words in alphabetical order and write definitions for each example of slang to create a glossary of English slang.



 Frida Kahlo is famous for her self-portraits and the symbolism in each painting of herself. Mr. Farill explains the significance of the elements in Kahlo's self-portraits to Paloma when they visit the art museum: “See, Frida was a deliberate painter. Every color and image meant something to her. At this time of her life, she painted her hair knotted up in braids on top of her head. Many believe it had to do with the fact that she was confused about whether she had made the right choice to remarry Diego.” Paloma also notes the possible symbolism of jewelry and animals featured in Kahlo's paintings. Try your hand at a self-portrait in Frida Kahlo's style that includes elements of things that are important to you. What are your hobbies? Dreams? Favorite places and animals? Think of how you will incorporate what is important to you in your self-portrait. Create a class art gallery by arranging the self-portraits you and your classmates design to showcase your work.

 Frida Kahlo's husband, artist Diego Rivera, was very influential in her life by shaping the way she painted and dressed, and her thoughts about politics. In *Me, Frida, and the Secret of the Peacock Ring*, Diego Rivera plays an important role in the story as well by hiding Frida's jewelry in a small room at Casa Azul after her death. Research the life and art of Diego Rivera and write a short informational report about the famous muralist.

 Tavo shares with Paloma that Frida Kahlo's possessions, including her artwork, are protected by national patrimony in Mexico and explains that this means that Kahlo's work, her art, and her personal items are protected by the Mexican government and cannot be taken outside of the country without special permission—permission that is rarely granted. What is your opinion of restricting an artist's work to his/her country of origin through the policy of patrimony? Write a persuasive piece about whether famous artists' work should remain in their native countries or be shared with the world.



A letter from author **ANGELA CERVANTES**

Dear Reader,

I have always been fascinated by renowned artist Frida Kahlo. My middle-grade novel *Me, Frida, and the Secret of the Peacock Ring* is fiction, but features real tidbits from her life and work. The idea for the novel came from my reading *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* by Hayden Herrera. In the biography, there is a section that notes that Kahlo wanted to make a peacock ring for herself. It continues that Kahlo even went so far as to collect “little stones” for the ring.

I was fascinated by this detail of Kahlo’s life and began searching for the ring in every photograph of the artist I could find. Despite the fact that Kahlo often wore several elaborate rings, I never spotted the peacock ring among them. I wondered . . . did she ever finish making the ring? If so, where was it?

This led me to Kahlo’s home, La Casa Azul, in Coyoacán, Mexico. At La Casa Azul, I didn’t find any clues about the peacock ring, but I did learn something even more riveting. After Frida Kahlo died in 1954, her husband, Diego Rivera, placed many of Kahlo’s personal items (a magnificent array of jewelry, hair accessories, clothes, and medical devices) into a bathroom near her studio. He ordered it locked and it remained sealed until 2002.

Adding the true story of the locked bathroom to the very real possibility of another hidden room filled with more Kahlo treasures, is where my young main character, Paloma Marquez, stumbles in.

At the end of *Me, Frida, and the Secret of the Peacock Ring*, Paloma has unlocked new memories and new friendships—and discovered a love for her father’s birthplace.

I hope you enjoy the story! Thank you so much for reading.

Very best,

Angela Cervantes



Kenny Johnson

Angela Cervantes is a poet, storyteller, and animal lover. Her poetry and short stories have appeared in various publications, and she has written the novels *Gaby, Lost and Found* and *Allie, First at Last*. When Angela is not writing, she enjoys hanging out with her husband in Kansas and eating fish tacos every chance she gets. Keep up with Angela at angelacervantes.com.