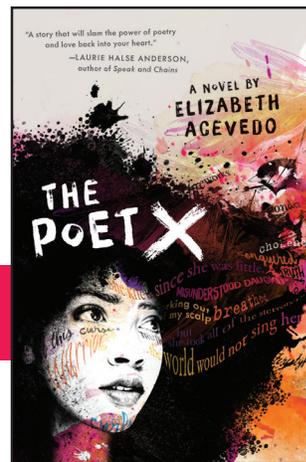


THE POET X

BY ELIZABETH ACEVEDO

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



GRADES 9 AND UP

ABOUT THE BOOK

Xiomara Batista feels unheard and unable to hide in her Harlem neighborhood. Ever since her body grew into curves, she has learned to let her fists and her fierceness do the talking. But Xiomara has plenty she wants to say, and she pours all her frustration and passion onto the pages of a leather notebook, reciting the words to herself like prayers—especially after she catches feelings for a boy in her bio class named Aman, who her family can never know about. With Mami's determination to force her daughter to obey the laws of the church, Xiomara understands that her thoughts are best kept to herself. When she is invited to join her school's slam poetry club, she knows that she could never get around Mami's rules to attend, much less speak her words out loud. But still, she can't stop thinking about performing her poems. Because in the face of a world that may not want to hear her, Xiomara refuses to be silent.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

SILENCE

1. How does Xiomara reckon with her own silence? Have you ever felt silenced? Why or why not?
2. What does it mean to "hold a poem in the body"? Do you think you have words living inside of you? What words are they?
3. What are the rules, implicit and explicit, that Xiomara identifies her mother having for her? Are they different than rules her mother sets for other people? Why or why not?
4. How does Xiomara feel about her brother being gay? How does she think her silence affects Twin? Have you ever stayed silent and wished you hadn't? How can you speak up in your own life?
5. How does silence protect Xiomara? How does Xiomara's silence harm the people she is closest to? How do her words free her?

BRAVERY

6. What is it about writing that makes Xiomara feel brave?
7. How does Xiomara's relationship with writing change her relationship with her mother over the course of the novel? Why do you think her writing affects her relationship with her mother? What about church and spirituality—how does X compare and contrast religion (prayer) and poetry?

VOICE

8. What is it about writing that makes Xiomara feel brave?
9. Why does Xiomara feel as though "[her] words are okay" when she is in Ms. Galiano's class, but not when she is with other people or in other places (p. 264)? Do you have a place where your words feel more or less safe? What makes a person or a place feel safe?
10. Have you ever heard a poem or song or seen a movie that made you feel seen?
11. Why does Xiomara call poetry club a prayer circle? Do you think that writing can be healing? Do you think art can be healing?

CREATIVE WRITING PROMPTS

CHOOSE YOUR FAVORITE SONG. Write an ode or praise poem honoring it.

RULES FOR SLAM. What are rules you live by?

LIST THE FIVE SENSES. READ THE POEM "NAMES." What do you know about your name? How is your name a sound? A smell? A touch?

WHAT DO YOU STAY SILENT ABOUT THAT YOU SHOULDN'T? Xiomara has a lot of secrets she keeps to herself that she only reveals in poetry. What is one thing you wish more people knew about you that you haven't been able to say?

READ XIOMARA'S RESPONSES TO MS. GALIANO'S WRITING ASSIGNMENT "When was the last time you felt free?" Write your own answer to Ms. Galiano's question. (p. 244–248)

CHOOSE ANY OF MS. GALIANO'S ASSIGNMENTS IN THE BOOK. Write your own answer in response.

CHOOSE ONE OF XIOMARA'S POEMS IN THE BOOK. What is the structure of the poem? What poetic devices is she using? (repetition, rhyme, onomatopoeia, metaphor, praise, haiku, etc.)? Using the same poetic device and/or structure found in the poem you chose write your own poem.



Photo by Stephanie Ifendu

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth Acevedo is the youngest child and only daughter of Dominican immigrants. She holds a BA in performing arts from the George Washington University and an MFA in creative writing from the University of Maryland. With more than fourteen years of performance poetry experience, Acevedo is a National Poetry Slam Champion, Cave Canem Fellow, CantoMundo Fellow, and participant in the Callaloo Creative Writing Workshop. *The Poet X* is her debut novel. She lives with her partner in Washington, DC. Find her online at www.acevedopoetry.com