

A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO *Celia C. Pérez*



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A 2018 Pura Belpré Author Honor Book

The First Rule of Punk is a wry and heartfelt exploration of friendship, finding your place, and learning to rock out like no one's watching.



There are no shortcuts to surviving your first day at a new school—you can't fix it with duct tape like you would your Chuck Taylors. On Day One, twelve-year-old Malú (María Luisa, if you want to annoy her) inadvertently upsets Posada Middle School's queen bee, violates the school's dress code with her punk rock look, and disappoints her college-professor mom in the process. Her dad, who now lives a thousand miles away, says things will get better as long as she remembers the first rule of punk: Be yourself.

The real Malú loves rock music, skateboarding, zines, and Soyrizo (hold the cilantro, please). And when she assembles a group of like-minded misfits at school and starts

a band, Malú finally begins to feel at home. She'll do anything to preserve this, which includes standing up to an anti-punk school administration to fight for her right to express herself!

Zines filled with black-and-white illustrations and collage art throughout make *The First Rule of Punk* a perfect pick for fans of books like *Roller Girl* and online magazines like *Rookie*.

“Armed with a microphone and a pair of scissors, this book is all about creating something new and awesome in the world. Malú rocks!”

—**Victoria Jamieson**, author and illustrator of the *New York Times* bestselling and Newbery Honor-winning *Roller Girl*

Discussion Questions

1. On page 33, Malú mentions Frida Kahlo is her favorite artist. What comparisons do you see between them?
2. On page 49, a girl in Malú's class asks the question, "What are you?" Have you ever experienced someone asking another person this question? It is what's considered a microaggression. What do you know about microaggression? What can kids do when they or their friends experience it? How does Malú react?
3. What are some words Malú uses to define the "modern girl" and how is she different from the "perfect señorita" she imagines her mother would like her to be?
4. On page 112, Malú and her mother talk about the difference between being "real Mexican" and "half-Mexican." Why does Malú feel she's not as Mexican as her "super-Mexican" mother? Why do you suppose her mother wants her to learn so much about what it means to be Mexican? How does this make Malú, who is biracial, feel?
5. On page 134, Malú learns that a "coconut" is brown on the outside, white on the inside. This is another verbal microaggression Malú experiences. What does this mean? How does she react?
6. On page 143, Malú's dad says, "Turning an insult into something you embrace is a good way of empowering yourself." What are some other groups that have reclaimed words used as insults and began using them themselves? What does this mean both for groups that do this and those who have oppressed them by creating the name in the first place?
7. On page 180, Ellie suggests they start a petition. Why does she want them to do it? How do petitions accomplish social change?
8. Compare the mother-daughter relationship on page 190 between Señora Oralia and Mrs. Hidalgo to the relationship between Malú and her mother. What similarities and differences do you see?
9. On page 244, Malú sees an ofrenda and learns about Día de los Muertos, which Malú says is "NOT Mexican Halloween." What is Día de los Muertos? What is an ofrenda? What do you learn about the dead and their place in Mexican cultural practices from this scene and exchange?
10. What is "un pajarito quetzal"? Why does Malú look like one? Research what the bird represents according to Mexican history and tradition. How is this connected to who Malú is becoming? (283)
11. On page 296, Malú defines what it means to be punk. What does it mean to you to be punk? Why could this be considered a good thing?

From the award-winning author of *The First Rule of Punk* comes the story of four kids who form an alternative Scout troop that shakes up their sleepy Florida town.



When three *very* different girls find a mysterious invitation to a lavish mansion, the promise of adventure and mischief is too intriguing to pass up.

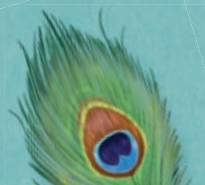
Ofelia Castillo (a budding journalist), Aster Douglas (a bookish foodie), and Cat Garcia (a rule-abiding bird-watcher) meet the kid behind the invite, Lane DiSanti, and it isn't love at first sight. But they soon bond over a shared mission to get the Floras, their local Scouts, to ditch an outdated tradition. In their quest for justice, independence, and an unforgettable summer, the girls form their own troop and find something they didn't know they needed: sisterhood.

“Thought-provoking, timely, and laugh-out-loud funny—*Strange Birds* explores friendship, community, and the role each of us plays in creating a better world”

—**Aisha Saeed**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Amal Unbound*

“*Strange Birds* is an inspiring story about the power of truth, and of true friends.”

—**Rebecca Stead**, *New York Times* bestselling author of the Newbery Medal winner *When You Reach Me*



Discussion Questions



1. What is a Flora? How do we know what they value? What other group oaths do you know about that communicate values? How does Lane feel like she might disagree with their laws and codes of behavior?
2. What is Cat's objection to the Flora hat? How does the hat's existence conflict with the values the Floras claim to stand for? (25)
3. On page 126, Lane says, "An oath [is] a promise. Maybe if her family had spit into their palms and made an oath, they would have stayed together. Maybe an oath was what made individuals a real group. Maybe an oath was what the girls needed." Have you ever agreed to an oath? If so, what were the agreements, spoken or unspoken, that you made? Do you agree that oaths have the power to hold groups together? If so, why? How?
4. Why did the Migratory Bird Treaty Act become a law? How does this connect to the Floras? What role does the MBTA of 1918 play in the story which takes place a hundred years later?
5. On page 198, Aster says, "White people don't usually come to this side of the Wall unless they're doing something touristy." What are the invisible walls that exist in your city? How do they separate or segregate the town's residents? What privileges or benefits exist on one side of the wall that do not exist on the other side?
6. On pages 200–201, Aster says, "But people see you for your skin color first regardless of what language you speak. Like, your pale cousins can go to places without thinking twice about how they'll be seen. I bet it's not the same for your Black cousins. Just ask them." What do you know about colorism? Read and discuss the difference between colorism and racism.
7. What does the group's peacock badge stand for? What other embroidered badges do you know that exist in the world? Where do people wear them? Why?
8. What does Aster discover about the connection between the Winter Sun orange trees and the DiSanti family? How does this confirm or conflict with the history she knows?
9. What does it mean when the girls use the slogan "RETURN THE FEATHERS"?
10. On page 265, Aster's grandpa says, "Being an activist isn't like moving from one job to another or changing shirts. It's something you always are." Explain what you think he means by this statement.
11. What do the girls mean when they refer to stealing the hat as "civil disobedience"? (271) What does that term mean? Do you think civil disobedience could work to create change?

The First Rule of Punk Activities

PRE-READING

1. Malú is Mexican-American, but her father is white. An important part of Malú's journey is understanding the role culture, race, and ethnicity play in her life. Use THIS glossary (www.racialequitytools.org/glossary) to choose seven or eight new vocabulary words to learn and use while reading the book. Post them near you and practice using them to write and talk about character and plot development in the novel. Consider using the instructions in the back of the book to make a zine with visual cues to help better define the words you have chosen.

DURING READING

2. On pages 104–105, we learn about some Mexican and Mexican-American punk bands. Research new bands by looking at their names, countries of origin, and band members. What are some quotes band members are known for saying? What are some connecting beliefs or ideas that unite them? Make a thematic playlist of songs that are all connected to the same idea, like “romance” or “rebellion.” You may include some from page 197 to help you get started. Write a page or two explaining why you chose each song with specific lyrics and images to bring your explanation to life.
3. The Bracero program began in 1942 and brought many Mexican workers to the United States as guest laborers. It ended in 1964, but its legacy lives on. Use THIS site (www.labor.ucla.edu/what-we-do/research-tools/the-bracero-program/) to identify as much as you can about individual stories of farm laborers. Create a profile of one specific worker, capturing their story with a picture that symbolizes an important part of their narrative, a quote with their name, and their city or town of origin, as well as anything you can learn about what happened to them once they got to the US and after they left. Create a mini-poster with this information, then do a gallery walk with peers to learn about the workers they chose to profile.
4. Change.org is one of the leading sites used to start petitions for social action and change. What is something in your community or part of the world that you would like to change? Come up with a problem, identify the causes for that problem, and formulate a possible solution that has a deadline (so you have a better chance of seeing it happen). Make a petition on Change.org and use social media to send it to as many people as possible. Track your shares and responses as a class using a thermometer for each petition and color sections in as you get more and more responses. If your petition goes beyond your school walls to create change within your community, partner with a local organization that might benefit from your petition and see if they might help you spread the word!

POST-READING

5. The zines are a really important part of *The First Rule of Punk*. As such, there are instructions included in the back of the book for how to make a zine. You will notice that each of Malú's zines has a theme. Use words and symbols from online or offline resources to capture your thinking about a topic in a zine. You may consider some of the following: resistance, transformation, identity, race, culture, language, music, food.

Standards*: CCCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4.A, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4.C, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.5, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.5.A, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.5.C

Additional Resources: The Forgotten Mexican Punk Rebellion of 1985 | <https://www.change.org/> | Dress for Success: Public School Uniforms | Mexican X-plainer: Chiclets & Aztecs by David Bowles | Top 10 Things to Know about Day of the Dead | Bracero History Archive

Strange Birds Activities

PRE-READING

1. There are various times throughout history when kids and teens have formed clubs or associations for the purposes of creating social action or change. Conduct an internet search to find organizations run for and by women and/or an under-represented group and create a Padlet or other visual bulletin board that explains what the organization is, who runs it, and what the mission statement is. What social problem was it created to solve? Is there a local chapter in your area? How can you get involved?

DURING READING

2. On page 41, we learn about the Floras' codes of conduct, eight laws, and behavior expectations through their oath. "*A Flora is courteous. A Flora is cheerful. A Flora is helpful. A Flora is loyal.*" Complete the following chart for each character using a quote as evidence from the text to describe each girl in the first column. In the second column, explain what the quote reveals about the girl in your own words. In the third column, draw a symbol to represent the character. In the fourth column, choose one word to describe a value or trait for each character that either agrees with or is in opposition to one of the traits belonging to the Floras. Explain how your chosen word connects to the character.

Character	Quote	Quote Analysis	Symbol	One word value or trait
Ofelia/Aster				
Cat/Lane				

3. On page 166, the girls list several slogans, like "No taxation without representation" and "Give me liberty or give me death." Research historical and present-day slogans and the organizations that created them. Look for examples of banners or signs with people using them during demonstrations. What is the overall purpose of a slogan? Use your imagination to create a memorable slogan for a cause you care about. Connect the slogan to a social cause or reason for rebellion, rather than a commercial product. Make a visual representation of your slogan including the words and/or a picture to reinforce the idea. Hang the posters and signs with your slogans all around your classroom. What do they reveal about common concerns and/or beliefs? Try to eliminate all but one or two that capture agreements or beliefs held by the entire class. Can you limit it to one? If so, could that be your class slogan?

POST-READING

4. Many organizations mobilize youths using the model of transformational resistance and through referencing a critique of social oppression. Consider the critique of social oppression as a framework for looking at systems that work to oppress individuals in your community and the ways individuals can resist, as the girls did, to create positive change.

At the end of the book, you'll find a handbook called *The Ostentation of Others and Outsiders*. It has several ideas for connecting with some of the girls' favorite hobbies and activities, as well as creating your own badges. In groups, research a social issue you care about and create a slogan, a badge, and a code of conduct, oath, and/or field guide to support the group's mission. How does the group's mission connect to social justice and move individuals or communities away from social oppression?

Standards*: [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.4](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.9](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.4](#)

Additional Resources: "What's 'Colorism'?" How Would Your Students Answer This Question?: [Teaching Tolerance](#) | CARE: Global organization for the elimination of poverty and spread of social justice among women | [Malala Fund](#): Working for a world where all girls can learn and lead | [Youth Participatory Action Research](#) | <https://www.girlscouts.org/> | [United States Institute of Peace](#): Women in Nonviolent Movements | [The Front](#): The Aesthetics of Female Resistance | [World Wildlife Fund](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Celia C. Pérez is the author of *Strange Birds: A Field Guide to Ruffling Feathers* and *The First Rule of Punk*, a 2018 Pura Belpré Author Honor Book, a 2018 Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children’s Book Award Winner, and a 2018 *Boston Globe–Horn Book* Fiction and Poetry Honor Book. She lives in Chicago with her family, where, in addition to writing books about lovable weirdos and outsiders, she works as a librarian. She is originally from Miami, Florida, where roosters and peacocks really do wander the streets.

Visit her at celiacperez.com.



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This guide was written by Julia E. Torres. Julia is a veteran language arts teacher and librarian in Denver, Colorado. Julia serves teachers around the country by facilitating teacher development workshops rooted in the areas of social justice, anti-racist education, equity and access in librarianship, and education as a practice of liberation. Julia also works with students locally and around the country with the goal of empowering them to use literacy to fuel resistance and positive social transformation. Julia serves on several local and national boards and committees promoting educational equity and progressivism. She is the current NCTE Secondary Representative-at-Large, and she is also a Heinemann Publishing Heinemann Fellow and Book Ambassador for The Educator Collaborative. Connect with Julia on Twitter @juliaerin80.