

**CUBA 15
BY NANCY OSA**

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2006
Grades 6-8**

Submitted by Bonnie Ellis, School Librarian
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Title: Cuba 15
Author: Nancy Osa
Publisher: Random House, 2003
Pages: 288

Summary

Violet Paz's Cuban grandmother is determined that she will have a *quinceanero*, a Cuban celebration on her fifteen birthday. Violet doesn't feel Cuban – or Polish (her ancestry on her mother's side). She just feels American. In trying to please her Cuban grandmother she begins to question her roots, leading to some unexpected consequences for her whole family.

Violet Paz, 50% Cuban-American, 50% Polish American, and 100% all-American, is in a quandary. Her Cuban grandmother wants her to have a *quinceanero*, a celebration of her “coming of age” on her fifteenth birthday. Violet knows almost nothing about Cuba, Cuban customs, or her Cuban heritage, and she definitely does not want to have a *quinceanero*. The thought of standing up in front of everyone in a frilly pink dress makes Violet cringe. But her mother is in her grandmother's camp, and the fifteenth celebration becomes a given. Since she has to do it, Violet decides to learn something about the customs of Cuba and about her heritage, but this endeavor proves to be more difficult than she thought. In order to make the celebration her own, she and her two best friends, Leda and Janell, decide to make the theme of her party “All the World's a Stage” and plan a dramatic presentation. In addition to all the *quinceanero* planning, Violet must write a comedy speech for her district's speech tournament and try to beat her grandfather in the ongoing dominoes game on the back porch. Events threaten to get out of hand, but Violet finally realizes she must combine both the past and the present to be her total self.

Author Biography

Nancy Osa is a native of Chicago (the setting of her book) who attended Reed College in Portland, Oregon, and decided to stay. Her father was Cuban and her mother's family came over on the Mayflower. *Cuba 15* is actually her second novel. Her first was written as her thesis and has never been published. She says she believes knowing our past helps us understand our present and our

future and that is why she loves to read. It helps us put things in perspective. She says books bring us together with all sorts of people we might never meet otherwise. “If knowing each other is the first step toward peace, then reading is a humanitarian effort. And readers are charting the course of history.”

Awards

Delacorte Press Prize for a First Young Adult Novel
Pura Belpre Honor Book
YALSA Best Book for Young Adults
ALA Notable Book for Children
Americas Award Author Honor Book

Related Books

Jesse by Gary Soto. This is a portrait of two ambitious Mexican-American brothers who hope junior college will help them to escape their heritage of tedious physical labor.

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros. Vignettes about a young girl growing up in the Latino section of Chicago, and the multiple characters that are part of her neighborhood – sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes joyous.

How Tia Lola Came to Visit/Stay by Julia Alvarez. Story tells about ten-year-old Miguel, who is at first embarrassed by his colorful aunt, Tia Lola, when she comes to Vermont from the Dominican Republic, but he soon learns to love her.

When I Was Puerto Rican by Esmeralda Santiago. A coming-of-age memoir of Esmeralda Santiago who was raised in Puerto Rico and then moved to New York City. Esmeralda overcame adversity, won acceptance to New York City's High School for the Performing Arts and then went on to Harvard.

Classroom Connections

- Let students talk about or write about elements of their culture they would like reflected in **their own “coming of age” celebration**. When Nancy Osa was asked what she would include in her quinceanero she replied, “My theme would be ‘Let the Good Times Roll.’ I would enjoy blending all the elements of my roots—there would be Cuban music, Chicago blues, and food from both ends of that spectrum.”
<http://www.bookclubs.ca/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=0385732333&view=rg>

- Talk about the **transition from childhood to adulthood**. What events mark that transition in different cultures or circumstances? Look also at *A Day No Pigs Would Die* by Robert Newton Peck or *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane.
- Discuss how **family history** plays a part in so many things that are part of our lives. See how many cultures are reflected in your classroom. Let the students make a family tree and learn about the countries of origin of their ancestors. The *In America* series from Lerner is a good resource.
- Discuss **Cuba's historical relationship to the United States** and how it is shaping culture and policy in the United States today. Use Joan Lowery Nixon's *Playing for Keeps* as a starting point.

Web Sites

Nancy Osa

<http://www.nancyosa.com/>

Author site contains information a biography and information about *Cuba 15*.

Cuba - Heritage

<http://www.cubaheritage.com/>

Contains information about the Cuban historical heritage – articles, photographs, places, people, architecture, music, and art.

Daisy's Quinceanero

<http://www.wxxi.org/amerfamily/algarin2.html>

Includes pictures of a real life quinceanero ceremony.

Kids @ Random – Reader's Guide

<http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=0-385-73233-3&view=rq>

Includes discussion questions related to the book.

Lucia and Lizette's Quinceanero

<http://www.heatherhughesphotography.com/id15.html>

Includes pictures of a real life quinceanero ceremony.

Make a Family Tree

<http://www.pbs.org/americanfamily/tree/>

Make a family tree on-line.

Cuba Heritage

<http://www.cubaheritage.com/>

Site includes articles, illustrations and photographs of historical events, places, people and culture of Cuba.