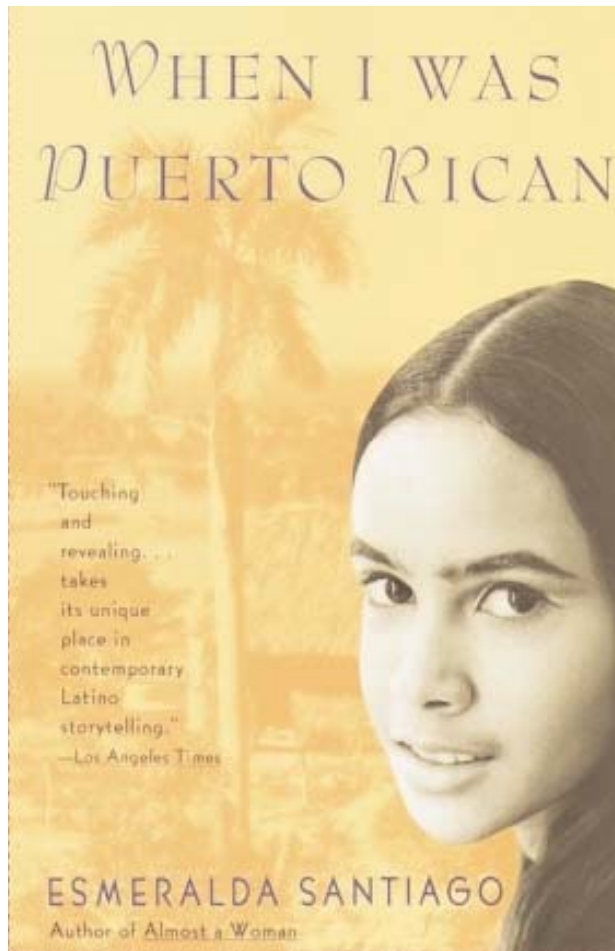


# One Book for Greater Hartford



A 2004 Reading Resource Guide  
Hartford Public Library



A 2004 Reading Resource Guide for  
One Book for Greater Hartford

# When I was Puerto Rican

By Esmeralda Santiago





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## One Book for Greater Hartford

One Book is a regional effort to engage the community in a shared experience, the reading of one book. This is an accessible, affordable and fun literary event that we hope will encourage broad participation and offer opportunities to gather and discuss issues relevant to our community.

Last year, One Book for Greater Hartford presented James McBride's *The Color of Water, A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*, a powerful portrait suffused with issues of race, religion and identity. In 2002, Edwidge Danticat charmed us when she shared her best-selling memoir *Breath, Eyes, Memory*.

This year we present *When I was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago, a triumphant coming-of-age memoir that gives voice to an inspirational cross-cultural journey. We hope our Reading Resource Guide, prepared especially for this book, will serve as a useful tool to enhance your personal involvement in this regional endeavor. And, we hope you will join the greater community at the One Book author event at Hartford Public Library on Saturday evening, October 16, to hear this talented writer.

Louise Blalock  
Chief Librarian, Hartford Public Library

## 2004 Honorary Chair

Mayor Eddie A. Perez is the 2004 Honorary Chair for the One Book for Greater Hartford.



Eddie Alberto Perez arrived in Hartford from Corozal, Puerto Rico in 1969, at the age of 12, and was greeted by gang wars, substandard housing and limited opportunities for kids like him. He experienced first-hand the social turmoil of Hartford in the 70s, his family regularly moving from apartment to apartment in search of a safe environment.

He graduated from Hartford Public High School in 1976 and later earned an associate's degree from Capital Community Technical College. Along the way his affiliations included the Ghetto Brothers (street gang) and Father Tom Goekler's Sacred Heart Church youth group. Fortunately Father Tom prevailed, leaving Perez with a passionate commitment to dealing with the strife and injustice that surrounded him.

In 1978, Perez took a job as a VISTA volunteer to address tenant issues in the North End. That position led to his role as a founding member of O.N.E./C.H.A.N.E., a grassroots offshoot of the South End's HART. In 1986, he became director of MASH (Make Something Happen), an early welfare-to-work effort for Stowe Village Families.

In 1989, new Trinity College President Tom Gerety made Perez his first hire as director of community relations. By 1994, he had a Trinity degree in economics that he earned while working there full-time, and was named associate vice president of community and government relations for the college.

In June 1999, he was tapped as president and executive director of the Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (SINA), a 25-year old organization founded by Trinity College and Hartford Hospital. In that capacity, he spearheaded the completion of the \$112 million Learning Corridor and launched SINA's \$220 million Neighborhood Initiative, now recognized as a national model for comprehensive community revitalization.

## **2004 Honorary Chair**

Mayor Perez was first elected mayor of the City of Hartford in 2001 and is currently serving his second term. As the city's first Latino mayor and first to serve under a revised city charter that provides greater powers to the mayor, Perez has set a new vision for the city.

## **Acknowledgements**

The 2004 One Book for Greater Hartford is a partnership project of Hartford Public Library, the Greater Hartford Literacy Council, the Greater Hartford Arts Council, The Hartford Advocate, Preview Connecticut, Hispanic Professional Network, The Talk of Connecticut and The Mary Jones Show and Barnes & Noble, West Hartford. The project receives the continued support of community members who endorse and enhance the objectives of One Book for Greater Hartford.

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## About the Author

Esmeralda Santiago began her extraordinary cross-cultural journey on the island of Puerto Rico. Born in San Juan, she came to the United States when she was thirteen years old, the eldest in a family that would eventually include eleven children.



Santiago attended New York City's Performing Arts High School where she majored in drama and dance. After eight years of part-time study at community colleges, she transferred to Harvard University with a full scholarship. She studied film production and graduated in 1976 magna cum laude. Shortly after graduation, she and her husband, Frank Cantor, founded Cantomedia, a film and media production company, which has won numerous awards for excellence in documentary filmmaking.

Her writing career evolved from her work as a producer/writer of documentary and educational films. Her essays and opinion pieces have appeared in national newspapers including *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*, and in *House & Garden*, *Metropolitan Home*, and *Good Housekeeping* magazines.

She is also author of the novel, *America's Dream*, published in six languages, and the Alternate Selection of the Literary Guild. Her second memoir, *Almost a Woman*, received a number of "Best of Year" mentions, in addition to an Alex Award from the American Library Association. It was adapted into a film for ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre, which aired nationally on PBS in 2002. This film received a Peabody Award in 2004.

Santiago released her third memoir, *The Turkish Lover* (Da Capo Press) September 1, 2004. Also released this year is *Writing a Life*, an intimate documentary film portrait of Santiago that represents a twenty-four year collaboration between the best-selling author and her filmmaker husband, Frank Cantor. The film will be shown in Hartford at the

## About the Author

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art on the evening of October 15.

With Joie Davidow, Santiago is coeditor of the anthologies, *Las Christmas: Favorite Latino Authors Share Their Holiday Memories* and *Las Mamis: Favorite Latino Authors Remember Their Mothers* both published by Knopf.

In addition to her literary endeavors, she is a spokesperson for public libraries. Santiago has designed and developed community-based programs for adolescents, and was a founder of a shelter for battered women and their children. She serves on the boards of organizations devoted to the arts and to literature, and speaks about the need to encourage and support the artistic development of young people.

## **Esmeralda Santiago answers the question**

### **"Why did you title your first book**

#### ***When I was Puerto Rican?*"**

My first book went through many titles before I settled on *When I was Puerto Rican*. It was important to me that the title reflect not only what the book was about, but its emotional theme. The first draft of the book was much longer than the finished work, and it was in two parts, *When I was Puerto Rican* - about my early years on the island and *My American Life* - about my adolescence and young womanhood. After editing, the book was much shorter, and I chose to end it just after my audition to Performing Arts High School.

I chose to keep the title in the past tense for three very important and emotionally sensitive reasons.

1. The book is about a Puerto Rican childhood that is today impossible to duplicate. I lived in a rural barrio in Toa Baja that had not yet been "modernized." This meant that not only did we not have the amenities of running water and electricity but because of its geography and rural character, Macún was isolated from urban Puerto Rican and North American cultures. I didn't know much about the United States, never imagined that I would one day live there. The Puerto Rican culture I grew up in, then, was a product of its time, its place, and its local history. It was a Puerto Rican childhood uncontaminated by American culture. The 'was' in the title refers to the strong sense of self I had as a rural Puerto Rican.

2. The second reason for the past tense refers to the first. A few days after we arrived in Brooklyn I learned that, by virtue of being in the United States I was "Hispanic," a word I'd never heard in Puerto Rico, and had certainly never applied to myself or to anyone I knew. Later I learned that people from Spanish speaking countries (though not Spaniards) were also called "Latinos." It is hard to convey the terror that those two words made me feel when I was first told that I was a Hispanic, or a Latina. It was as if a label were pasted on my forehead, placed there for the benefit of others, to make it easier for them to identify me, saving them the energy to get to know me. I am from Puerto Rico, a real place with its own culture and historical perspective. There is no Hispanica, no Latinica. The words Hispanic and Latina take

**Esmeralda Santiago answers the question  
"Why did you title your first book  
*When I was Puerto Rican*?"**

away from me my place of birth. The title *When I was Puerto Rican*, then, is a comment on the labeling that turned me into Hispanic and Latina without my knowledge or permission.

3. In the summer of 1976, shortly after my graduation from Harvard University, I returned to Puerto Rico with the intention of staying there. It had been my long delayed dream to return to the island, where most of my family had moved after years in New York. It was a shock, then, to be told by Puerto Ricans on the island that I "didn't look" Puerto Rican or that I was not "really" Puerto Rican because I had lived in the United States for so long. It was as if, while I was gone, degrees of Puerto Ricanness had been established to distinguish who was 100% Puerto Rican and who wasn't. I couldn't understand it, didn't know who had established those degrees or why they were important. I was proud of having retained my Puerto Rican culture as I learned to function in that of the United States. On the island, however, that didn't matter. All people cared about was that I had not lived my entire life there. The title *When I was Puerto Rican* was a call to open discussion about those painful distinctions that have been established about who is Puerto Rican and who is not. I have found that the people most offended by the past tense in the title (and some people have been) are those most likely to deny other Puerto Ricans their identity because it's different from their own.

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<http://www.esmeraldasantiago.com/FAQ/faq.html>.*

## Discussion Questions for *When I was Puerto Rican*

1. Are the portraits of Mami and Papi sympathetic ones?
2. Describe the differences in the way Negi's parents treat her. Is she more open to the influence of her mother or her father?
3. Mami and Papi are strong and complex influences in Esmeralda's life. Which influences help her develop and make her stronger? Which influences hinder her personal development?
4. Does Santiago's memoir portray her childhood and her parents without judgment? Or is judgment implied?
5. How did being the oldest child in the family shape Esmeralda's personality and affect her childhood?
6. What do you think is the effect on Esmeralda of the frequent moves she must make, both in Puerto Rico and then in New York?
7. How strong a role does tradition play in Esmeralda's upbringing?
8. The book portrays distinctly different cultural roles for Puerto Rican men and women. Santiago also describes stereotypical as well as traditional perceptions of one gender by the other. How do the differing gender roles and perceptions affect Esmeralda's home life?
9. Being chosen to close the eyelids of the dead baby had a searing effect on Esmeralda. Do you think her mother should have permitted or even encouraged her to do that?
10. Esmeralda often feels like an outsider-a jibara in a city, a social outcast in school. Does she ever feel really comfortable, really at home?
11. Esmeralda's concept of love comes from a number of sources - soap operas on the radio, romance novels, the real-life models of her parents, her relatives, and her neighbors. Does she stand a good chance of understanding love?
12. A number of times Esmeralda describes splitting herself in two and observing herself. What leads her to do that? Is it a survival technique? A means of straddling two realities? A sign of emotional fragility?

## Discussion Questions for *When I was Puerto Rican*

13. What personal qualities enable Esmeralda to assimilate so quickly when she moves to Brooklyn? What circumstances hinder the assimilation?
14. What does Esmeralda's audition at New York City's Performing Arts High School reveal about her?
15. How does Esmeralda feel about being a jibara? Does her attitude change over time and in different situations?
16. If we see the memoir as a coming-of-age story, at what point had Esmeralda come of age?
17. Santiago has portrayed her parents and relatives as adults seen through the eyes of a child. Did you find that to be an effective narrative technique?
18. A number of times in the memoir, the world is portrayed as a frightening, disturbing place for a child. An example is the family's brief stay in El Mangle, with its raw sewage floating by the house and its noxious atmosphere. Have her parents failed to keep her safe? Or does the memoir capture the "life of the child," the struggle that all children undergo as they try to understand adult behavior, social customs, and religious practices?
19. The title of the memoir is *When I was Puerto Rican*. Is Santiago saying that she is no longer Puerto Rican? She also describes herself as a "hybrid." Does she see that as a positive? Do you? In writing the memoir has Santiago managed to resolve the issue of her cultural identity?
20. Does the memoir convey to non-Puerto Ricans what it's really like to be Puerto Rican?

*Questions provided by Connecticut Humanities Scholar and book discussion leader Jane Hoben, of the Canton Public Library.*

## **Family / Intergenerational Book Discussion Series for *When I was Puerto Rican***

Four key elements of Santiago's work seem appropriate foundations for family or intergenerational book discussions: the leitmotif of shared food; proverbs; the contrast between city and country settings; and the strength of women. Below are some suggestions for structuring a discussion session around each element. Each can stand alone, or they may be used in a series.

To create a welcoming atmosphere for the sessions, plan on including refreshments from one of the many fine Puerto Rican restaurants or bakeries in Hartford. Island music, widely available at public libraries, could be playing quietly. Share the responsibility for reading aloud among the older children and adults in the group. Finally, encourage questions and conversation with the children during the readings, as well as after they are finished, to insure their engagement and understanding.

### **Session A: Sharing Food**

Note: Bring a bowl, fruit, paper cups, spoons, and one or two paring knives to this session.

Negi's family and friends love to share delicious traditional foods with one another. *To start a session on this topic, share these three passages from the book:*

Christmas is a time of special celebration. From the beginning of December, Mami spent most of her time in the kitchen. For weeks the house smelled of crushed onions, fresh oregano, and cilantro. Relatives I'd never met appeared to sit for hours at the kitchen table with Mami...to eat rice with pigeon peas, pastels pasteles wrapped in banana leaves, crispy fried plantains, and boiled yucca. After dinner they drank anisette and I was given the crunchy diamonds that formed in the sugarcane strings inside the bottles. (p. 40)

*When a hurricane threatens Negi's home, her families and others take shelter in a neighbor's house:*

Inside the house, every crack and chink had been plugged with rags to

## **Family / Intergenerational Book Discussion Series for** ***When I was Puerto Rican***

keep the wind out. Mattresses were stacked, bunches of green bananas hung from the rafters, the gash where the machete had cut dripped sticky white ooze onto the floor. The room was shadowy, lit with quinqués and fat candles, steamy with the fragrant of garlic and onions. Several old hens had been sacrificed and everyone contributed to the communal meal that would be cooked on our kerosene stove, spiced with Dona Lola's fresh oregano, and shared by the four families who would pass the hurricane in Dona Ana's one-room cement house....The warmth of the thirty or so people inside, the familiar aroma of spices and good cooking, and the hushed play of the children was extraordinarily comforting, the way wakes were, or weddings or baptisms. (p. 108)

*Negi moves from her home in Puerto Rico to New York City, and her grandmother welcomes her there:*

Tata....smiled mischievously as she put a bowl of asopao on the table.

“Here you are,” she said. “Chico makes good asopao, but not as good as mine.”

It was delicious, thick with rice and chunks of chicken, cubed potatoes, green olives, and capers. She tore off a chunk of bread from a long loaf on top of the refrigerator, spread it thick with butter, and put the bread on a napkin in front of me.

“Monin told me you like bread. This is fresh from the bakery down the street.”

It was crunchy on the outside and soft on the inside, just the way I liked it. (p. 220)

Next, read Sylvia Rosa-Casanova's picture book, *Mama Provi and the Pot of Rice* (Atheneum, 1997). Mama Provi grew up in Puerto Rico with five brothers and four sisters, and "didn't know how to cook for only two people. In her big family, she had been taught to cook for a dozen people at one time." When her granddaughter Lucy catches the chicken pox, Mama Provi prepares an enormous pot of arroz con pollo for her. As she climbs the seven flights of stairs to Lucy's apartment, she has enough of the dish to trade a bowl to each of seven different residents for their own specialty. As a result, she and Lucy are able to share a "tremendous feast" in no time at all - *en un dos por tres*.

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If the children in the group are in the lower elementary grades, follow Mama Provi with *The Cabbage Soup Solution*, by Erika Oller (Dutton, 2004). Elsie, an elderly cabbage-grower, her two very fat cats, and an assortment of rabbits work together to create a delicious cabbage soup in this simple tale. If the children in the group are in the upper elementary age range, read Patricia Polacco's *Chicken Sunday* (Philomel, 1992). A "Chicken Sunday" is one on which Miss Eula Mae Walker cooks fried chicken, collard greens, hoppnhoppin' john, and spoon bread. Her two grandchildren and a friend find a way to return some of the love she has shown them on these occasions.

Start a discussion of these readings by asking:

- What does your family like to eat on special occasions?
- Are any of these foods part of your family's cultural heritage - for example, was a recipe brought from Italy, or the American South, to your home in Connecticut? Who cooks these traditional foods?
- When do you share food with your larger family? When do you share food with friends and neighbors?

As a closing activity, make a community fruit salad. After everyone washes his or her hands, set out a large bowl. Younger children can wash fruit, older children can peel an orange or banana, and adults can cut washed and peeled fruit into the bowl. Everyone can take a turn stirring the mixture, and ladling out a cup for someone else to eat.

### **Session B: Proverbial Wisdom**

Note: Prior to the session, write out a number of proverbs on slips of paper, one proverb per slip. Maggie Kneen's *"Too Many Cooks..." and Other Proverbs* (Green Tiger, 1992) is a good source to use for this activity if younger elementary children are attending, as the proverbs are simply defined at the back of the book. Other compilations are widely available at public libraries. Bring these slips, crayons, and drawing paper to the session.

According to Webster's Dictionary, a "proverb" is "a short popular

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saying expressing some commonplace truth." Esmeralda Santiago has chosen a proverb to head each chapter of *When I was Puerto Rican*. These express central themes not only of the individual chapters, but the book as whole, such as "a jibaro can never wash away the stain of the plantain." (p. 7)

Begin a discussion of proverbs by defining the term, and giving some familiar examples from English, such as "too many cooks spoil the broth," or "people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." Then, read the following passage from the book.

*Negi and her neighbor Dona Lola are discussing a nearby farm (finca). Dona Lola says:*

"You know, it's an Americano that owns the finca back there."

Negi "Laolao's finca?"

"Bah! A otro perro con ese hueso [Another dog has that bone]. That finca doesn't belong to Laolao. That man doesn't own the hole to lay his corpse in."

"But everyone says..."

"Del dicho al hecho hay un gran trecho."

"What does that mean?"

"It means there's a long way between what people say and what is. That finca belongs to Rockefeller."

"Who's he?"

"An Americano from Nueva Yorkes. He's going to build a hotel back there." The finca stretched across the road to the horizon, the tall grass broken now and then by groves of lemon, orange, and grapefruit trees, herds of cattle, and, in the distance, a line of coconut palms.

"What will they do with all those cows?"

Dona Lola guffawed. "You're worried about the cows? What about us?"

"Well, we don't live on the finca..."

"Do you think they will let us stay here if they build a hotel?"

"Why not?"

"Yo conozco al buey que faja y a la víbora que pica." [I know the bull that charges and the serpent that stings.] (p. 55-56)

Identify the proverbs Dona Lola has used, and briefly discuss the

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meaning of each. Then, read *Mi Primer Libro de Dichos/My First Book of Proverbs*, collected by Ralfka Gonzalez (Children's Book Press, 1995), in which traditional Mexican proverbs appear in both English and Spanish. Encourage discussion of the proverbs as you read. In particular, ask participants to give examples of situations in which you might use the proverb. For example, you might describe a formerly polite child who learned bad manners (which will amuse the children to hear in an exaggerated form) from friends, and summarize with the proverb, "If you hang out with wolves, you will learn how to howl/El que anda con lobos a aullar se enseña."

After reading *Mi Primer Libro de Dichos*, ask participants to choose at random one of the slips of paper with a proverb that you have prepared. Then, hand out drawing paper and crayons. Encourage each participant to discuss the meaning of his or her proverb with others, if clarification is needed, and then to illustrate it. Conclude the session with participants sharing and explaining their illustrations.

### **Session C: City Life/Country Life**

Note: Bring an easel pad or several sheets of easel pad paper, masking tape, markers, writing paper, and pencils to this session.

Begin your discussion of the distinctions between city life and country life by reading this passage from *When I was Puerto Rican*.

*Esmeralda describes her first impressions of New York City as the family arrives in a taxi from the airport with all of their belongings:*

Rain had slicked the streets into shiny, reflective tunnels lined with skyscrapers whose tops disappeared into the mist. Lampposts shed uneven silver circles of light whose edges faded to gray. An empty trash can chained to a parking meter banged and rolled from side to side, and its lid, also chained, flipped and flopped in the wind like a kite on a short string. The taxi stopped at a red light under an overpass. A train roared by above us, its tiny square windows full of shapes.

"Look at her," Tata laughed from the front seat, "Negi's eyes are

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popping out of her head.”

“That's because the streets are not paved with gold, like she thought,” Mama teased. (p. 217)

Next, introduce *Danitra Brown Leaves Town* by Nikki Grimes (Amistad, 2001). In a series of poems and letters, Danitra's summer at her aunt's house in the country and her best friend Zuri's summer back home in the city are described. Follow this book with one or two of the following three:

- Virginia Lee Burton's *The Little House* (Houghton Mifflin, 1978), a classic story in which a country house is unhappy when the city, with all its buildings and traffic, grows up around her.
- *City Chicken* by Arthur Dorros (HarperCollins, 2003) about a chicken from the city who visits the country to see what she has been missing, and finds that it's not "all it's cracked up to be."
- *Fly Homer Fly* by Bill Peet (Houghton Mifflin, 1979). Peet tells the story of a country pigeon talked into visiting a city park by a sparrow. After the pigeon injures a wing, he is helped home by the sparrow and his friends.

Each of these books presents both the positive and negative sides to living in the city or in the country. Begin a discussion of the readings by asking participants to list descriptive words and phrases about life in the city and life in the country. Record these suggestions on an easel pad so the whole group can see the growing list of thoughts and ideas.

After the group has completed the discussion, ask children to select either the city list or the country list. Then, ask them to select phrases, and add more of their own, to create a list poem describing life in that setting. Encourage them to give the poem a title which makes it clear which setting they chose. For example, a participant might title a poem, "On My Block," and write:

Neighbors talking,  
Kids playing,  
A bus rolls by,

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Sirens in the distance,  
Pigeons, squirrels,  
Families close by.

*After the poems have been shared among the group, have participants reflect on Santiago's narrative about returning to the rural area of her childhood after a visit to a city in Puerto Rico:*

I wanted to jump out of the truck and run, run down the hills dipping into sandy valleys in front of familiar houses bordered with passion fruit and morning glory. To climb the rocky hills at the peak of which our neighbor's porches rose even higher, the balustrades festooned with potted plants, the zinc overhangs sparkling in the midday sun. To climb the grassy mound behind Uncle Candido's house and grab a pink pomarrosa from the scraggly trees that were forbidden to everyone but family members. To crunch into that succulent fruit that smelled like roses and let the aromatic juice run down my chin and stain my pretty city dress with its bows, buttons, and ribbons. (p. 46)

### **Session D: Strong Women/Brave Girls**

Note: Before the session, visit the public library. Check out books with images of strong women - books of portraits, biographies, and/or accounts of women's history. Look particularly for images of strong Hispanic women, such as Frida Kahlo and Dolores Huerta. Bring the books, or photocopies of some of the images, plus pencils and writing paper, to the session.

In the chapter entitled "Mami Gets a Job," Negi gives readers insight into what happened in her family when her mother broke a local taboo and took a job at a factory. *Open the sessions with a reading from that chapter:*

I had worried that not having Mami around would make our lives harder, but at first it made things easier. Mami was happy with her work, proud of what she did, eager to share with us the adventures of her day in the factory, where she stitched cotton brassieres she said had

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to be for American women because they were too small to fit anyone we knew.

But her days were long, filled in the morning with the chores of making both breakfast and dinner, getting seven children ready for school or a day with Gloria, preparing for work, going there and back, returning to a basketful of mending, a house that needed sweeping, a floor that needed mopping, sheets that had to be washed and dried in one day because we didn't have two sets for each bed. (p. 123)

After reading this passage, read aloud two of the following three works about other strong women.

- *A Chair for My Mother* by Vera B. Williams (Greenwillow, 1982). Three generations of women save their hard-earned spare change in order to buy an armchair after all their furniture is lost in a fire.
- Sarah Stewart's *The Gardener* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997). A young girl spends the summer in the city with her uncle, and changes her drab surroundings with her irrepressible spirit and her green thumb.
- "The Clump of Basil," a traditional Puerto Rican tale found in *Latin American Folktales: Stories from Hispanic and Indian Traditions* (John Bierhorst, editor; Pantheon, 2002). Clever Pepita both outwits a king and cures him of illness.

In closing the reading portion of the program, recommend to participants that they read the short chapter book *My Name is Maria Isabel* by Alma Flor Ada (Scarecrow, 1999). On Maria Isabel's first day in her new school in the U.S., she is involuntarily re-named "Mary" because there are already two "Marias" in the class. She defends her name and her Puerto Rican heritage when her teacher's writing assignment "My Greatest Wish" gives her that opportunity.

Start a discussion of the strong women/brave girls in the works read using these or similar questions.

- How would you describe each of the characters?
- What obstacles do they face, and how do they overcome them?

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- Which character do you most wish to be like, or which character is an inspiration to you?
- Have you known any strong women/brave girls? If you have, can you give examples of their strong/brave actions?

Next, ask each set of parents and children to study one of the images of strong women that you have brought. Each set of parents and children should come up with a written list of descriptive phrases about the image. If time permits, participants may select and respond to additional portraits. After a period of time, have participants come together as a group again and share their observations.

*As a final reflection, share Esmeralda's description of the change in her mother after her first trip to New York:*

Mami had come back from New York with cropped hair that formed a curly black ring around her face. Her nails were long and painted deep pink. She wore high heels and stockings that shadowed the blue lines on her legs.

But besides her appearance, there was something new about her, a feeling I got from the way she talked, the way she moved. She had always carried herself tall, but now there was pride, determination, and confidence in her posture. Even her voice assumed a higher pitch that demanded to be heard. I was puzzled and frightened by this transformation but at the same time enthralled by it. She was more beautiful than before, with eyes that seemed to have darkened as her skin glowed paler. (p. 189-190)

## **Bibliography of Works by Esmeralda Santiago**

*Almost a Woman* (also translated into Spanish: *Casi una mujer*)

*America's Dream* (also translated in Spanish: *El sueño de América*)

*Las Christmas: escritores latinos recuerdan las tradiciones navidenas*  
[editor] (also available in English)

*Las Mamis: Favorite Latino Authors Remember Their Mothers* [editor]

*When I was Puerto Rican* (also translated into Spanish: *Cuando era puertorriqueña*)

## **Bibliography of Works about Esmeralda Santiago**

Hernández, Carmen Dolores. *Puerto Rican Voices in English: Interviews with Writers*, 1997.

Kevane, Bridget and Juantia Heredia. *Latina Self-Portraits: Interviews with Contemporary Writers*, 2000.

Langer, Irina Rich. "A Lesson in Turning Memories into Memoirs." *The New York Times* (April 2, 2000: 15).

Puleo, Gus. "Dance Between Two Cultures: Latino Caribbean Literature Written in the United States." *Hispanic Review* 67 (1999): 407-411.

## Suggestions for Further Reading

Isabel Allende, *The Infinite Plan: A Novel*.

Rudolfo A. Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*.

Joy L. De Jesus (ed.), *Growing Up Puerto Rican: An Anthology*.

Jack Delano, *Puerto Rico Mio: Four Decades of Change = cuatro decadas de cambio*.

Ronald Fernandez, *The Disenchanted Island: Puerto Rico and the United States in the Twentieth Century*.

Rosario Ferré, *Eccentric Neighborhoods*.

Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity*.

Ivonne Lamazares, *The Sugar Island*.

Luisita Lopez Torregrosa, *The Noise of Infinite Longing: A Memoir of a Family and an Island*.

Nicholasa Mohr, *Nilda: A Novel*.

Mario Murillo, *Islands of Resistance: Puerto Rico, Vieques, and U.S. Policy*.

Edward Rivera, *Family Installments: Memories of Growing Up Hispanic*.

Roberto Santiago (ed.), *Boricuas: Influential Puerto Rican Writings - an Anthology*.

Jose Trias Monge, *Puerto Rico: The Trials of the Oldest Colony in the World*.

Faythe Turner (ed.), *Puerto Rican Writers at Home in the USA: An Anthology*.

## **Filmography for *When I was Puerto Rican***

1. *Americanos as Apple Pie: The Latino Experience in America*. (2001)

Documentary series examining Latino cultures in America. Titles include: "Issues of Latino Identity: The Yearning to Be..." and "The Blending of Culture: Latino Influence on America". USA. Available from Films for the Humanities and Sciences.

2. *Women of Hope: Latinas Abriendo Camino*. (1996)

This documentary program profiles twelve Latina women who have broken new ground in their lives and achievements. Featuring Nydia Velázquez, the first Puerto Rican congresswoman; Sandra Cisneros, Chicana novelist and poet; and others. USA. Dir. by Robert Rosenberg. Available from Films for the Humanities and Sciences.

3. *P R [The Young Puerto Rican]*. (1987)

Award-winning film provides a comparison between Puerto Rico and the South Bronx from the point of view of Carlos, a 13-year old boy whose family has moved to New York. USA. Written and produced by Tom S. Robertson. Available from Films for the Humanities and Sciences.

4. *Nuyorican Dream*. (2000)

Documentary following five years in the life of a New York Puerto Rican family. USA. Dir. by Laurie Collyer. Available from California Newsreel.

5. *Nueba Yol*. (1996)

Movie chronicles a big-hearted widower's struggle to make a new life in New York City after leaving the Dominican Republic. Dominican Republic. Dir. by Angel Muniz. Available from Kit Parker Films Inc.

6. *La Guagua Aérea [A Flight of Hope]*. (1995)

Tragicomedy follows a Puerto Rican immigrant who travels back and forth by airplane between San Juan and New York. Puerto Rico. Dir. by Luis Molina Casanova. Available from Producciones Culturales.

7. *Almost a Woman*. (2001)

Drama based on the memoir of the same name by Esmeralda Santiago. USA. Dir. by Betty Kaplan. Available from PBS Pictures.

## **Filmography for *When I was Puerto Rican***

8. *My Family*. (1995)

Multi-generational saga of 60 years in the life of a Mexican-American family living in Los Angeles. USA. Dir. by Gregory Nava. Available from New Line Home Video.

9. *El Súper*. (1979)

Slice-of-life story about Cuban exiles in New York City. Spain/Cuba. Dir. by Leon Ichaso and Orlando Jimenez Leal. Available from New Yorker Films.

10. *Home Is Struggle*. (1991)

Explores the lives of women who have come to the United States from various Latin American countries for very different reasons. Dir. by Marta Bautis. Available from Women Make Movies.

11. *Bricando El Charco - Portrait of a Puerto Rican*. (1994)

A mix of fiction and non-fiction, this film tells the story of a young Puerto Rican woman who is attempting to build a sense of community in the United States. USA. Dir. by Frances Negrón-Muntaner. Available from Women Make Movies.

12. *The Puerto Ricans: Our American Story*. (1999)

Examines Puerto Rican customs, traditions and achievements. USA. Available from WLIW21, New York.

*Most audiovisual materials (videos, DVDs, etc.) purchased or borrowed are for home use only. Be aware that if you use them for a public program you must first get permission, called Public Performance Rights, from the copyright holder. A reference librarian can help you determine who to ask.*

*Most titles are available at Hartford Public Library.*

## **Webliography for *When I was Puerto Rican***

### **About the author:**

<http://www.esmeraldasantiago.com/index.html>

Esmeralda Santiago's personal web site.

<http://www.prfaa.com/eng/FeaturedArtist.asp?id=682>

Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration Featured Artist.

[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/woman/ei\\_santiago.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/woman/ei_santiago.html)

PBS interview with Esmeralda Santiago.

[http://www.ncteamericancollection.org/aaw\\_dream\\_resources.htm#wrap](http://www.ncteamericancollection.org/aaw_dream_resources.htm#wrap)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) "Resources for Esmeralda's Dream."

<http://www.puertorico-herald.org/issues/2003/vol7n27/EsmerSanti-en.shtml>

"Esmeralda Santiago: From Images To Words And Back":  
author interview.

### **About the book:**

<http://www.randomhouse.com/vintage/read/puerto/>

Publisher's reading club guide.

<http://www.randomhouse.com/acmart/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=0679756760&view=tg>

Publisher's teacher's guide.

<http://www.randomhouse.com/acmart/teacherguides/cuando.html>

Publisher's teacher's guide Spanish edition.

<http://voices.cla.umn.edu/newsite/authors/SANTIAGOesmeralda.htm>

University of Minnesota Voices from the Gaps, Women Writers of Color.

### **Puerto Rican/American experience:**

<http://www.centropr.org/>

Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter College is a research center dedicated to the study and interpretation of the Puerto Rican experience in the United States.

## **Webliography for *When I was Puerto Rican***

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

Puerto Rico and the American Dream - history, culture and politics of Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican diaspora.

<http://welcome.topuertorico.org/>

Information about the island of Puerto Rico.

<http://www.chs.org/nuestrashistorias/main.htm>

Connecticut Historical Society: online exhibition of the history of the Puerto Rican community in Hartford.

### **New York City:**

<http://www.nytimes.com/specials/nyc100/contents.html>

*The New York Times* web site, "100 Years of New York City" offers a time line of New York City history.

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eguides/amerihist/nyc.html>

Columbia University Library: New York City and It's History

### **Sites related to One Book projects, book groups and reading:**

<http://www.loc.gov/loc/cfbook/one-book.html>

Library of Congress Center for the Book,  
One Book Projects listed by State

<http://www.loc.gov/loc/cfbook/onebookbyauthor.html>

Library of Congress Center for the Book,  
One Book Projects listed by Author

[http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/when\\_i\\_was\\_puerto\\_rican.asp](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/when_i_was_puerto_rican.asp)

ReadingGuides.com book discussion group guide.

<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/WDIRN> - Access from Hartford Public Library/School

<http://sales.iacenter.com:1800/cgi-bin/iconn/rpa.pl> - Access from Home/Office with HPL library card.

"What do I Read Next?" Readers advisory tool made available by iconn.org, the Connecticut Digital Library.







