



# AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO



# ★ ★ FOUR STARRED REVIEWS! ★ ★

AN NCTE NOTABLE POETRY BOOK AND VERSE NOVEL SELECTION

A PURA BELPRÉ AUTHOR HONOR AWARD

AN ALSC 2024 NOTABLE CHILDREN'S BOOK

A USBBY 2023 OUTSTANDING BOOK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Aniana del Mar belongs in the water like a dolphin belongs to the sea. But she and Papi keep her swim practices and meets hidden from Mami, who has never recovered from losing someone she loves to the water years ago. That is, until the day Ani's stiffness and swollen joints mean she can no longer get out of bed, and Ani is forced to reveal just how important swimming is to her. Mami forbids her from returning to the water, but Ani and her doctor believe that swimming, along with medication, will help Ani manage her disease. What follows is the journey of a girl who must grieve who she once was in order to rise like the tide and become the young woman she is meant to be. *Aniana Del Mar Jumps In* is a poignant story about chronic illness and disability, the secrets between mothers and daughters, the harm we do to the ones we love the most—and all the triumphs, big and small, that keep us afloat.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**JASMINNE MENDEZ** is a Dominican American poet, essayist, translator, and award-winning author of several books for children and adults. Based in Houston, she is the co-founder and program director of the Latinx literary arts organization Tintero Projects and co-host of *Inkwell*, a poetry and writing podcast series.

This guide was written by Lorena Germán. Lorena is a Dominican American classroom educator, speaker, and author dedicated to inclusive and antiracist education.

# PRE-TEACHING CONSIDERATIONS

Before you begin teaching this book, I highly encourage you to read it yourself. There are two important elements in this narrative that you should prepare for when it comes to introducing them to students.

## JUVENILE IDIOPATHIC ARTHRITIS (JIA):

Aniana, the main character, shares symptoms throughout the earlier pages of the story. She describes her her pain, and midway through the narrative, she is diagnosed with JIA after much testing and many doctor visits. She has complex feelings about it and the rest of the novel is spent with her grappling with this new reality. This story might trigger painful memories or feelings in your own readers due to their experiences or those of their family. I suggest you ensure what on-site services are available for your students to process. Make sure you also set the tone for discussing and understanding health issues and diseases. Students should understand when and how to ask questions. They should also be clear about the conversations being serious and understand that they shouldn't laugh at Aniana's symptoms.

## DEATH & TRAUMA:

In the story, Aniana's mother loses a brother in her childhood. He died in the midst of a hurricane that hit the Dominican Republic. Her mother feels guilty about his death. At one point in the story, her mother explains the moment of his tragic death, and we witness her struggle with the trauma, particularly through dreams at night. Again, this might trigger painful memories or feelings for your students who might have similar experiences. Ensure you have on-site services that can meet your students' needs, should they have them.

# DISCUSSION & REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What observations can you make about the table of contents?
2. What information does the prologue offer in terms of Aniana and her passion for swimming?
3. What is the relationship between Aniana and her mother like?
4. What is the relationship between Aniana and her father like?
5. What is the relationship between Aniana and her brother, Matti, like?
6. Who is Maria Tere and what do you know about her relationship with Aniana?
7. Who is Madrina and what role does she play in Aniana's life?
8. Over the course of the novel, how does Aniana change and grow?
9. Over the course of the novel, how does Aniana's mother change and grow?
10. As you read the novel, Spanish is interwoven throughout. How does it enhance the language and dialogue?
11. Aniana and Maria Tere are both undergoing changes in their lives and characters. Both are having to face 'newness'. What is the difference between their support systems?
12. What role does the setting play in the development of the story?



# LITERARY ANALYSIS

## MOTIF:

Water plays an important role in *Aniana del Mar Jumps In*. It means different things to different characters and it achieves different things for different characters. Using the chart, track what you learn about water in the story and then identify what impact it has as a “character” in the story.

## MOTIF:

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	How does this character feel about water?	What happens to this character near the water?	What word best describes the role of water in this person's life? Cite evidence from the text to support your thought.
<b>ANIANA</b>			
<b>ANIANA'S MOTHER</b>			
<b>ANIANA'S FATHER</b>			

**CLICK HERE TO GET A REPRODUCIBLE CHART!**



## CONFLICT:

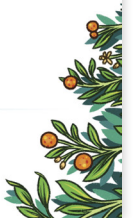
In the story, there are various important conflicts that further the plot. These are conflicts between several key characters and they are directly related to the main arc of the story. The author alludes to these tensions from the start and they develop over the course of the story. Complete the chart below to analyze the conflicts and their importance.

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	<b>ANIANA vs. MOM</b>	<b>ANIANA vs. HER BODY</b>	<b>MOM vs. DAD</b>
<b>TRIGGERS</b> What are some causes or early signs of this conflict at the start of the story?			
<b>CLIMAX</b> How does this conflict explode in the story? When does it really come to light?			
<b>IMPACT</b> What other events does this conflict cause? What side problems surge from this main problem?			
<b>RESOLUTION</b> How is this conflict resolved?			

**CLICK HERE TO GET A REPRODUCIBLE CHART!**



## SYMBOLISM:

In *Aniana del Mar Jumps In*, there are various objects, aside from water, that hold valuable meaning for the characters. These are symbols of greater feelings or ideas. They are shared and discussed by multiple characters and add complexity to the plot. Break students up into small groups and assign a symbol to each group. Small groups can also propose their own symbol that you may not have identified. Each symbol should have citations from where they are found in the story, a drawing to visually represent it, research on meaning and value from society, and any other relevant pieces of information that will enhance the understanding of the symbol's impact. Small groups can either present their findings to you or the class.

## POETIC STRUCTURE:

Throughout the story, Mendez uses concrete poems to convey meaning. Concrete poems are poems written and designed in a visual display to enhance the meaning and impact of a poem. Invite students to look at the poems on pages 25, 29, 35, 49, 61, 66, 199, 267, 322, and 341. Next, use the following questions to discuss the author's choices.

1. What is the poem about?
2. What do you notice about the shape of this poem?
3. How does the shape help you understand the meaning better?
4. What shape or movement in the poem catches your attention?
5. How do any of the concrete poems connect to the theme(s) in the book?

### TURTLE SHELL

Mami  
says she  
and Mateo  
were like  
a sea

turtle— different parts belonging to one body.  
Mateo was the soft squishy center that needed protecting,  
and she was supposed to be his shell. *Mateo*, she says, *was born*  
*with water in his lungs. Because, she says, Grandma had too*  
*much water in her womb when she pushed him out*  
*into the world. And so for the rest of his short life,*  
*he always found it harder to breathe.* So Mami used  
her lungs for them both. She would run races and  
Mateo would watch. Mateo would skip rocks in  
the river and she would fish them out. Mami  
would jump and catch fireflies with her hands  
and Mateo would save them in a jar.  
Mami and Mateo were like different  
parts of the same person. And  
when Mateo died, Mami  
became an empty turtle shell crowded  
with a darkness that no light or love  
could fix or fill ever again.

# TEXTS IN CONVERSATION

*Aniana del Mar Jumps In* deals with various subjects and has a main character who shares similarities with multiple characters from other pieces of media. For example, Aniana's issues with coming to terms with her new body and her difficulties in navigating a challenging relationship with her mother are similar to problems that many other characters face. In this section of the guide, I invite you to think about ways to partner this text with other popular and well-known stories, and welcome students into these studies.

TEXT	CONVERSATION
<i>Aniana del Mar Jumps In</i> → <i>Roller Girl</i> by Victoria Jamieson	Compare and contrast how both girls overcome challenges to play the sport/do the activity they love
<i>Aniana del Mar Jumps In</i> → <i>The Bluest Sky</i> by Christina Diaz Gonzalez	Compare and contrast the role of water in the protagonists' lives
<i>Aniana del Mar Jumps In</i> → <i>Head Above Water</i> by S.L. Rottman	Compare and contrast the protagonists' lives, the role of water and swimming in their lives, and how health impacts their choices
<i>Aniana del Mar Jumps In</i> → <i>Moana</i> (2016 film)	Compare and contrast the relationships between the girls and their parents and how water plays a role

The following three approaches outline how you can use these paired texts.

**CORE TEXT APPROACH:** In this approach, the whole class reads *Aniana del Mar Jumps In* and you select one excerpt from a secondary novel. You treat this as a mini lesson within the larger unit.

**TEXTS IN CONVERSATION:** In this approach, the whole class reads *Aniana del Mar Jumps In* and you select excerpts of several other novels in the chart, or all the novels in the chart. This becomes an extension of the unit instead of a mini lesson.

**TEXT & FILM ANALYSIS:** In this last approach, the whole class reads the core novel, possibly also analyzes one or more excerpts from the novels in the chart, and also watches the Disney film *Moana*. The novel begins with a quote from the movie, so you could guide them back to read it.

The following questions can be prompts for discussion or written work as you put these texts in conversation with one another.

1. What connection do you see between Aniana and the main character of this new book?
2. How do the stories compare and contrast?
3. What similarities and differences do you notice between the relationships in Aniana's book and the new book?
4. What conflict(s) are most important in these two stories and how do they impact the plot? How are they similar or different?
5. After watching the movie *Moana* and reading *Aniana del Mar Jumps In*, have students discuss the role of culture and heritage in both of the protagonists' lives.

# EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

## SCIENCE:

In this book, Aniana learns she has JIA. As part of studying this novel, have students create a repository of research on science and medical terms. There can be a word wall poster where terms are listed and defined as they are encountered in the text. Also, students can design their own mini dictionaries in a journal that captures the words they encounter. Additionally, they can research any scientific concepts that arise for them as they're reading.

## MEDICAL SCIENCE:

At the start of the story, Aniana begins to only share symptoms. The reader doesn't learn about her disease until after a diagnosis. Keep a "medical record" of what Aniana is sharing as her symptoms. Engage in a research project, using WebMD, for example, to try and discover what Aniana might be experiencing alongside her doctors. This type of activity will be especially engaging for students who are interested in the medical field and/or research.

## ART:

The cover of the novel illustrates Aniana with a beach setting behind her and with orange trees, like the ones outside her house. Invite students to select one moment or scene from the novel described in the story. After they select one, they can draw or paint it using as many details from the story as possible. For students who have not been exposed to a beach, they can see images online or watch videos to get a better understanding of what a beach looks like.

## HISTORY:

Aniana Vargas, the main character's namesake, was an anti-Trujillo activist and defender of the environment in the Dominican Republic. She worked with other activists for over thirty years to take him down. Unfortunately, she was persecuted and left as an exile from the island. However, through this story, author Jasminne Mendez is bringing light to her name and creating parallels between Vargas and del Mar, the main character. Invite students to research Vargas and Trujillo's regime and to trace how del Mar eventually harnesses the boldness and power of her namesake.

