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**Literature**  
Teaching Unit  
*Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide*



How the Garcia Girls  
Lost Their Accents

by Julia Alvarez

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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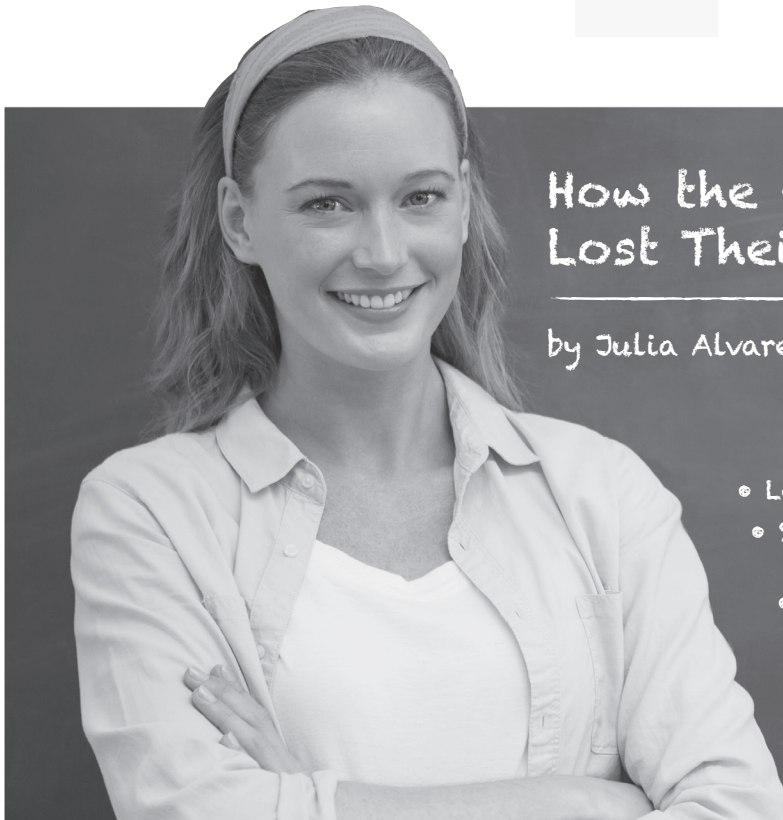
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# Literature Teaching Unit

*Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide*



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 **Prestwick House**

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938  
[www.prestwickhouse.com](http://www.prestwickhouse.com)  
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## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define vocabulary words from the story.
2. interpret Spanish words and phrases from their context in the story.
3. recognize when the point of view changes in this story and discuss how this sometimes abrupt change to a different perspective helps to add realism and believability to the characters.
4. discuss the quality of life the García girls are accustomed to before they immigrate to the United States; point out the ways their everyday lives change in the U.S.
5. write a character sketch of Papi describing the “old country” values he wants to instill in his daughters.
6. discuss the ways American values conflict with the “old country” values; cite incidents from the story showing how this conflict manifests itself in the adult lives of each of the four daughters.
7. cite incidents to support the following theme in this story: immigrant children, who have roots in two different cultures, often experience difficulties establishing their identities.
8. cite incidents from the lives of the daughters that illustrate the point that in this coming-of-age story, each girl has an experience that bridges the threshold from childhood to adolescence.
9. discuss the structure of the novel and the extent to which this structure reinforces the theme that immigrant children have difficulties establishing identities. Be sure to consider:
  - the episodic format
  - the story’s progression backwards through time
  - the frequent switch of settings.
10. discuss what each of the following might represent in the story: the figure on the bank, the cat, the Palmolive sign, the Barbie dolls, the raven, the puzzle of the human body, the face on the statue, snow, and the makes of cars.
11. write a character sketch of Laura discussing what her “special” stories reveal about each of her daughters.
12. comment on the significance of Yolanda’s many nicknames.

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. This story progresses backwards through time. Create a time line for each of the four daughters listing the major incidents in their lives.

BOOK I 1980 – 1972 BOOK II 1970 – 1960 BOOK III 1960 – 1956

Carla  
Yolanda  
Sandi  
Fifi

2. Why does the family immigrate to the United States? For what reasons does Papi decide not to return to the Dominican Republic?
3. List three “old country” values Papi wants to instill in his daughters.
4. Why does Mami often say “Good bulls sire cows”?
5. Family cohesion is an important theme of this story. How do each of the following incidents help to strengthen the García family unit?
  - Papi’s birthday party
  - Mami’s “special” stories about each daughter
  - Fifi’s sisters successfully break up her romance with Manuel
6. Why does Mami wear rainbow colors? In what sense does Mami try to help her daughters straddle the demands of both cultures?
7. Briefly summarize the circumstances in the story surrounding each of the following items. What might they each represent?
  - the Palmolive soap sign
  - the raven
  - the makes of American cars
  - the Barbie dolls
  - snow
  - the monkey hands
8. What are Yolanda’s “antojos”?
9. Cite three incidents from Yolanda’s life that support the theme that immigrant children with roots in two different cultures often have difficulties establishing their identities.

1. Who is the narrator for this first chapter? Briefly describe the setting.

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2. Find a metaphor on the first page. Explain it.

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3. How is Yolanda greeted by her Dominican relatives?

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4. Why might this visit to the island be different for Yolanda? What is her secret?

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5. What is Yolanda’s “antojo”?

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6. What “wave of tradition” is Yolanda planning to ignore? What is the literary term used in the following quotation?

“She [Yolanda] has sat back quietly, hoping she has learned, at last, to let the mighty wave of tradition roll on through her life and break on some other female shore. She plans to bob up again after the many *don’ts* to do what she wants.”

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**Chapter 4 – Joe  
Yolanda**

VOCABULARY

**amor** – love  
**cielo** – sky, heaven  
**monolingual** – knowing only one language  
**pobrecita** – poor baby

1. List some nicknames for Yolanda. How does she feel about these names? What might multiple versions of Yolanda’s name signify in this story?

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2. Where is Yolanda at the start of this chapter?

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3. Why does Yolanda begin to mistrust John?

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4. What evidence is there in the story that Yolanda’s mixed heritage may be harming her relationship with John?

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**Chapter 5 – Floor Show**  
**Sandi**

VOCABULARY

**caballeros** – gentlemen  
**cortege** – a procession or line  
**damas** – ladies  
**epistle** – a long formal instruction  
**largesse** – generosity from a patron  
**maitre d'** – head waiter  
**mantilla** – a lace scarf  
**papito** – grandfather  
**pastelón** – a casserole made with rice and beef

1. How is Dr. Fanning helping Papi?

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2. What does Sandi miss about her life in the Dominican Republic?

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3. List three instructions Mami gives to the girls concerning their behavior in the restaurant. Which of these worries Sandi?

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