

DISCUSSION GUIDE

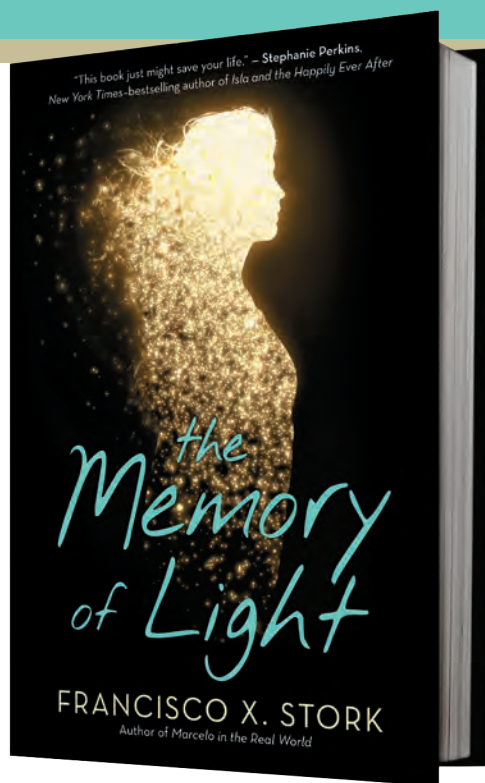
Grades
7 and up

There's only one
thing left to try:
living.

the Memory of Light

By the award-winning author of *Marcelo in the Real World*
FRANCISCO X. STORK

Meets State Standards Including Common Core—SEE INSIDE



Vicky Cruz shouldn't be alive.

That's what she thinks, anyway—and why she tried to kill herself. But then she arrives at Lakeview Hospital, where she meets Mona, the live wire; Gabriel, the saint; E.M., always angry; and Dr. Desai, a quiet force. With stories and kindness, honesty and hard work, they push her to reconsider her life before Lakeview, and offer her an acceptance she's never had.

Yet Vicky's newfound peace is as fragile as the roses that grow around the hospital. And when a crisis forces the group to split up—sending her back to the life that drove her to suicide—Vicky must find her own courage and strength. She may not have any. She doesn't know.

Inspired in part by the author's own experience with depression, *The Memory of Light* is the rare young adult novel that focuses not on the events leading up to a suicide attempt, but the recovery from one—about living when life doesn't seem worth it, and how we go on anyway.

Discussion Questions for *The Memory of Light*

Key Ideas and Details

1. Why is Vicky so sure at the end of chapter one that she will try to kill herself again? What happens during her first meal with Mona, E.M., and Gabriel that is different from her life at home? What does she mean when she thinks to herself, "Finally . . . Truth" (p. 22)?
2. Discuss Mona's theory "about how mental illness makes people smart" (p. 65). What does she mean? List the ways each of the members of the GTH acts that is "smart" and how it makes them feel about themselves. How does this relate to Gabriel's statement: "Depression is bad, but it can teach us some things" (p. 174)?
3. Discuss the phrase: "You can lie to others if you want—we all have to do that to stay alive—but don't lie to yourself about what you feel" (p. 69). What are the ways that Vicky has been lying to herself? What does she learn during her stay at Lakeview and at the ranch about being honest with herself?
4. How do the members of Vicky's therapy group help each other? In what ways are their lives different from each other? In what ways are their lives similar? Why is Gabriel so reluctant to share the reason he is in the hospital?
5. At what point does Vicky start looking ahead and realize that she can choose life? What role does Dr. Desai play in her recovery? Why does Dr. Desai want the members of the group to come to her ranch? What does the experience at the ranch mean to each of them?
6. Discuss Vicky's relationship with her sister Becca over the course of the book. How does that relationship change and grow? How does Becca help Vicky understand their father and stepmother in a different way? Compare Vicky's experience of family with the experiences of the others in the group.

Craft and Structure

7. Discuss the author's use of the present tense throughout this story. How does the use of present tense affect your reading and understanding of Vicky's struggle?
8. Why do you think the author chose to begin the book with Vicky's letter to Juanita, her nana? How does the letter—and the words Vicky chooses to use in that letter—set the tone at the beginning of the book?
9. Analyze the author's choice of words in specific scenes and how they enhance what happens during those scenes. Discuss his use of humor and perspective and how that balances the sometimes-difficult themes. At what points in the plot is humor important, and when is it necessary to make the tone more serious?
10. Discuss the ways in which the author helps us to get to know the four members of the GTH group. How does the author reveal the challenges that each of the four is facing? Do we learn more about each of them in the group discussions, through one-on-one conversations, or through their actions at the ranch?

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

11. Discuss the meaning of the stories Dr. Desai tells her patients about the man she knew in India and his elephant. What meaning do these stories have for each of the members of the group? How does the story about the monkey and the mango in the cage help Vicky understand herself better?
12. What does E.M. mean when he says, "All I know, I learned from Huitzilopochtli" (p. 114)? How does an ancient Aztec deity relate to E.M.'s life in the twenty-first century? Why does E.M. call Vicky "Huichi" after he gets to know her? What effect does that name have on Vicky?

Extension Activities

1. The author chose to use Spanish words intermingled with English in this book. If you are unfamiliar with these words or phrases, make a note of them and look up their meaning. Can you infer their meaning from the context? How does this use of language help you to understand the characters better? **CCSS.RL.9-12.4**
2. Consider the two poems of Emily Dickinson that Vicky reads. List the images the poet uses in each piece. What ideas do these poems contain that aid Vicky's recovery? Imagine the poem Vicky is writing in the epilogue and write your own poem inspired by the kinds of images you think she might use. **CCSS.RL.9-12.7; CCSS.W.9-12.2**
3. Research the legend of Huitzilopochtli and compare it to legends of ancient gods from other civilizations. Write a short synopsis of the ways these legends inform our understanding of human nature. **CCSS.RL.9-12.9; CCSS.W.9-12.7**

Further Reading

Books: Nonfiction

Blauner, Susan Rose. ***How I Stayed Alive When My Brain Was Trying to Kill Me: One Person's Guide to Suicide Prevention***. HarperCollins, 2002.
A memoir about surviving depression and suicidal thoughts with many helpful tips and tools from someone who has "been there."

Carlson, Dale, with Dr. Michael Bower. ***Out of Order: Young Adult Manual of Mental Illness and Recovery***. Bick Publishing House, 2013.
This helpful, straightforward guide describes many types of mental disorders and how to find the right kind of help.

Cozic, Charles. ***Teenage Mental Illness*** (Compact Research series). ReferencePoint Press, 2011.
Parks, Peggy J. ***Teenage Suicide*** (Compact Research series). ReferencePoint Press, 2012.
These two books provide an overview of mental illness and suicide issues, especially as they relate to the teen years, along with useful graphics and a wide variety of help that is available.

Books: Fiction

Foreman, Gayle. ***I Was Here***. Viking, 2015.
When her best friend, Meg, commits suicide, Cody is shocked and devastated. There's a lot that Meg never told her, but when Cody finally is able to open an encrypted computer file, everything is suddenly thrown into question.

Hopkins, Ellen. ***Impulse***. McElderry Books, 2008.
Three teens experience the aftereffects of suicide attempts in this novel that explores their pain in vivid free verse format.

Rapp, Adam. ***Under the Wolf, Under the Dog***. Candlewick, 2004.
Steve is in a downward spiral after his mother's death and his brother's suicide, but tries to find a way to bring hope back into his life.

Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255) • www.youmatter.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

The Trevor Project (especially for LGBTQ young people)

1-866-488-7386 • www.thetrevorproject.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

www.afsp.org/preventing-suicide/find-help

A Teenager's Guide to Depression

www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/teenagers-guide-to-depression.htm

Metanoia

www.metanoia.org/suicide

My Broken Palace

mybrokenpalace.com

About Francisco X. Stork



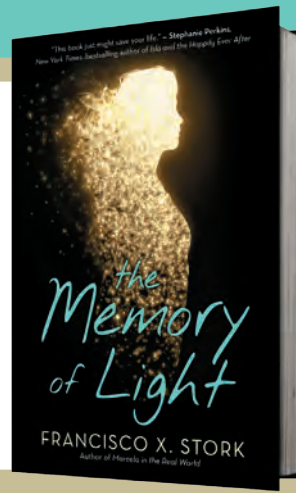
Photo credit: Anna Stork

Francisco X. Stork is the author of six books, including *Marcelo in the Real World*, which received five starred reviews and won the Schneider Family Book Award for Teens; *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors*, named a *New York Times* "Editors' Choice"; and *Irises*. He was born in Monterrey, Mexico, and spent his teenage years in El Paso, Texas. He now lives outside Boston, Massachusetts, and you can visit his website online at www.FranciscoStork.com.

Discussion Guide prepared by Connie Rockman, Youth Literature Consultant and Editor of the 8th, 9th, and 10th books in the H. W. Wilson (Salem Press) Junior Authors and Illustrators series.

Books by Francisco X. Stork

- ★ "Stork further marks himself as a major voice in teen literature by delivering one of his richest and most emotionally charged novels yet." —*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review
- ★ "Stork writes sensitively about Vicky's journey from near death to shaky recovery . . . it's a subject that needs the discussion Stork's potent novel can readily provide." —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review
- ★ "Vicky's story has undeniable emotional strength and an encouraging, compassionate message." —*Booklist*, starred review



Ages 12 and Up • 336 Pages
 HC: 978-0-545-47432-0 • \$17.99 (CAN \$22.99)
 EBK: 978-0-545-63402-1 • \$17.99 (CAN \$17.99)
 Audiobook also available.



- ★ *Booklist*, starred review
- ★ *The Horn Book*, starred review
- ★ *Kirkus Reviews*, starred review
- ★ *Publishers Weekly*, starred review
- ★ *School Library Journal*, starred review

An ALA Schneider Family Book Award Winner

A YALSA Top 10 Best Book for Young Adults

A New York Times Notable Children's Book of the Year

A Booklist Editors' Choice

Ages 12 and Up • 320 Pages
 HC: 978-0-545-05474-4 • \$17.99 (CAN \$22.99)
 PB: 978-0-545-05690-8 • \$9.99 (CAN \$10.99)
 EBK: 978-0-545-23184-8 • \$9.99 (CAN \$9.99)

A Horn Book Fanfare Book

A Kirkus Best Book of the Year

A Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year

A School Library Journal Best Book of the Year

- ★ *The Horn Book*, starred review
- ★ *Booklist*, starred review
- ★ *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

An ALA Best Fiction for Young Adults Selection

An Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award Winner

A Texas Lone Star Book

A Texas Tayshas High School Reading List Book

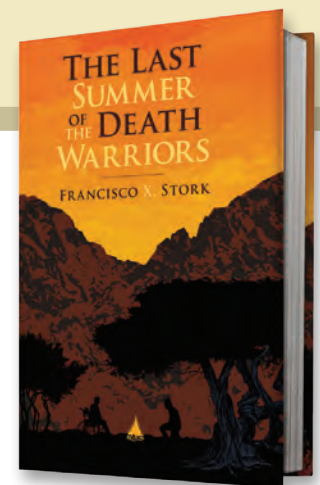
International Latino Book Award for
 Best Young Adult Fiction

A New York Times Editors' Choice

A Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year

A Cooperative Children's Book Center Choice
 (Fiction for Young Adults)

A Bank Street Best Children's Book of the Year



Ages 12 and Up • 352 Pages
 HC: 978-0-545-15133-7 • \$17.99 (CAN \$22.99)
 EBK: 978-0-545-28314-4 • \$9.99 (CAN \$9.99)



- ★ *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

Ages 14 and Up • 304 Pages
 HC: 978-0-545-15135-1 • \$17.99 (CAN \$19.99)
 EBK: 978-0-545-39263-1 • \$9.99 (CAN \$9.99)

Find this and other guides for download at
www.scholastic.com/discussionguides