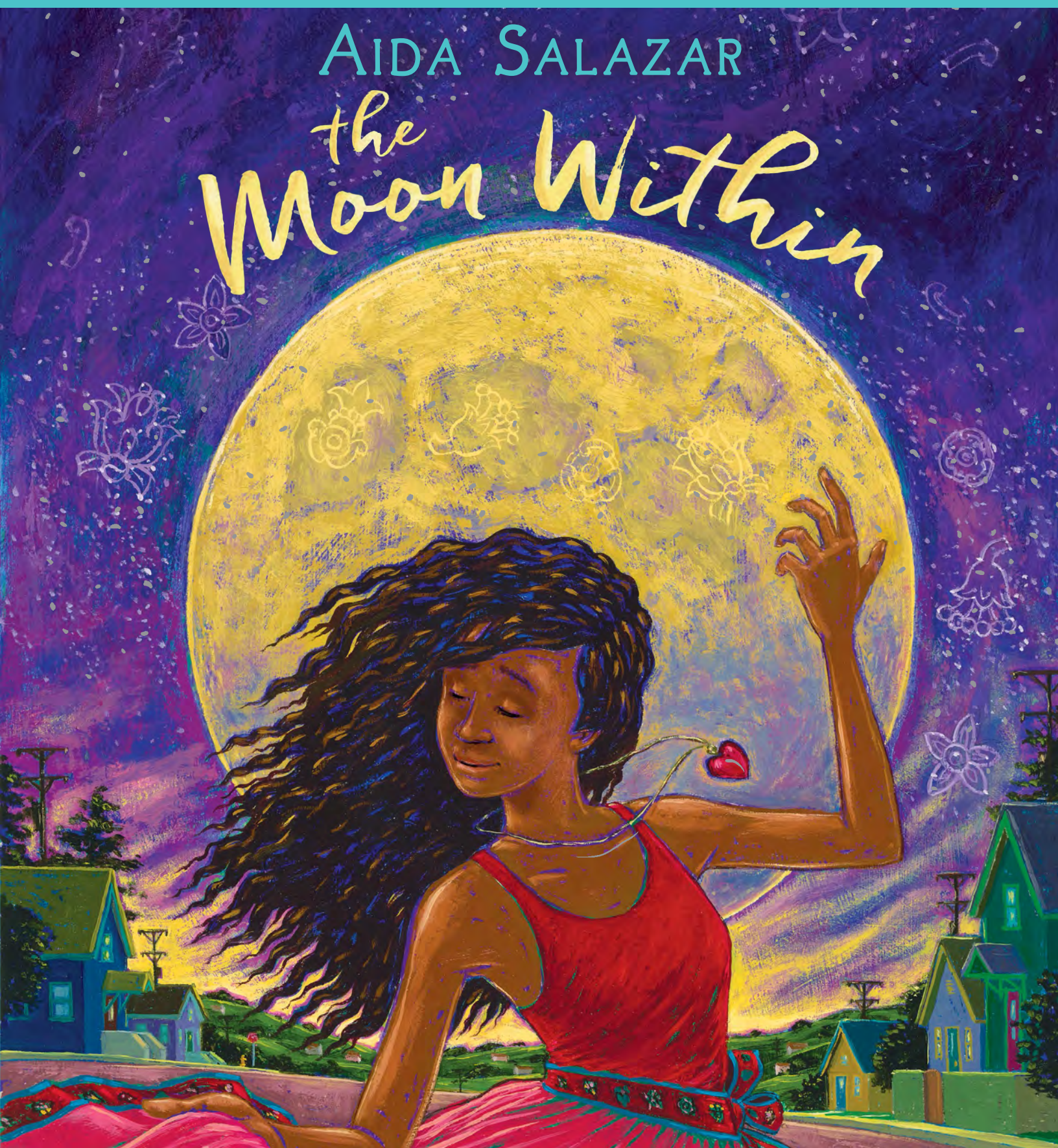


DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR AGES 8–12 • GRADES 3–7

HONORING OUR BODIES, CONNECTIONS WITH OUR ANCESTORS,
AND HEALING THROUGH ARTS AND COMMUNITY

AIDA SALAZAR *the Moon Within*





ABOUT THE BOOK

The dazzling story of a girl navigating friendship, family, and growing up from debut author Aida Salazar.

Celi Rivera's life swirls with questions. About her changing body. Her first attraction to a boy. And her best friend's exploration of what it means to be gender-fluid.

But most of all, her mother's insistence she have a moon ceremony when her first period arrives. It's an ancestral Mexica ritual that Mima and her community have reclaimed, but Celi promises she will NOT be participating. Can she find the power within herself to take a stand for who she wants to be?

★ "A worthy successor to *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* set in present-day Oakland."—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ "An excellent addition for upper middle grade and middle school readers, especially for maturing tweens in the midst of puberty."—*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ "The broader message is one of acceptance, celebration, and resistance."—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"This story is told in beautiful poems . . . the author reveals cultural aspects of Latinx (especially Xicana) and Caribbean peoples in rich detail."—*Booklist*

"Salazar handles this story with beauty and grace, giving young girls a picture of what it means to stand in your own power and reclaim your story."—*Bookpage*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

NEW MOON

1. How does Celi feel about her body's changes? How does Mima see those changes? In what ways are their views similar and in what ways are they different?
2. What are some words you would use to describe Celi and Magda's friendship?
3. Celi describes Iván as "Black-Xican." How is that different from how she defines herself (hint: see page 47)? What makes them different and what similarities do they share?
4. What are the healing powers of Mima's yerbitas in "Mima's Herbs"?

FIRST QUARTER MOON

1. How do the locations in this book (Oakland, California; La Peña; and Amanecer Community School) add to your understanding of the characters? What does each location provide for the plot?
2. In this part we see Celi's relationship with Iván grow. At the same time, Celi and Marco's friendship deepens. Compare these friendships. What advice would you give Celi at this time as she struggles to keep secrets and hold on to complex emotions?
3. Music is very important to Papi, Marco, and Celi. How do they describe their special relationship to instruments, movement, and/or music?
4. In "Not Magda," Teresa asks Celi to help Marco with his transition "as a xochichuah safe and loving within the community" (page 129). What are some of the ways that she helps him feel safe and loved?

LAST QUARTER MOON

1. Iván says, "I don't get it, but I want to" (page 204). Why does Celi respond the way she does? What advice would you give Iván?
2. Celi says, "I am grateful for my body" (page 208). How have her feelings changed? Identify poems or lines where her feelings change and how that moves her and the story forward.
3. During the moon ceremony, what is the significance behind the items placed on the altar, carried by people in the circle, and placed on Celi and Marco? And what is the significance of the words shared by Mima, Teresa, and the elder Yeya?
4. How has Marco changed over the course of the book? How have the people around him changed? What have their reactions been to his gender and identity?

FULL MOON

1. Celi experiences some transformative moments at La Peña, Lake Merritt, and visiting family in Los Angeles. Describe how communities and events at each of those places influence Celi.
2. What does Mima say and do to help Celi during this change? How does their relationship to each other evolve?
3. How does the music, drumming, and dancing described in the book mirror the developments in Celi and Marco's friendship?
4. Marco says, "I just want to be me, the Marco and Magda me" (page 190), and Celi tells Iván, "Marco's a xochichuah and a reflection of the Creator, Ometeotl" (page 192). How have characters like Teresa and Papi described Marco's transition? What is your understanding of how Marco self-identifies?

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

POETRY

1. Borrow a Line

Pick your favorite poem from the book and choose one line from that poem that resonates with you or that you like. Use that line to begin your own poem, exploring how you feel about that part of the book, that poem, or your own feelings.

2. Friendship

Reread the poem “My Best Echo” (page 24). Think of a metaphor for one of your friendships. Write a poem using this metaphor—think about how you can incorporate aspects of the metaphor like sight, sound, smell, touch, and/or taste to help you think of descriptive phrases.

3. A New Perspective

Identify a character you wish you knew more about. Pick a key scene and write a poem from that character’s perspective (e.g., Marco, Mima, Teresa, Juju, Papi, Iván, and others). What do they say? How do they feel? What do they want others to know about them?

4. Renewal and Healing

Reread the poem “Midnight Light” (page 221) and write a poem to encourage and support yourself. Focus on using words or phrases that will give you the strength to be yourself, to love yourself, and to grow to become a better person.

SOCIAL STUDIES & SCIENCE

- In “Moon Ceremony” (page 9), Mima says, “It is a ritual taken away from us during so many conquests” (page 10). Research moon ceremonies or choose another traditional practice and find out how colonization in different geographical regions impacted the ability of people to celebrate those ceremonies and traditions. If information about these traditions isn’t shared with the general public, why do you think that is?
- In “Not Magda” (page 125), we learn about Ometeotl, the Creator spirit and dual god of the Mexica tradition. Read more about Ometeotl in *Feathered Serpent, Dark Heart of Sky: Myths of Mexico* by David Bowles. Research different traditions with nonbinary deities and gender-diverse cultures (do research in libraries and/or online).
- Create your own herbal medicine guide using “Mima’s Herbs,” the “Ancestral Spiritual Resistance: Promises and Offerings” zine, and family or community knowledge as inspiration.
- Research the different phases of the moon and its impact on bodies (human bodies and bodies of water).

LITERACY

- Create emotional timelines for different characters in which you track important events and how the characters’ feelings change throughout the events described in the book.
- Translanguaging* is the way bilingual people use language. In *The Moon Within*, both Spanish and English are used throughout the book. Is there a pattern to the way each language is used? What words are in English? What words are in Spanish? What parts of speech are used in each language?
- Choose a poem from the book and look at how language is used stylistically. How is the setting described? What senses are used (touch, smell, sight, sound, taste)? How is dialogue used? Are there any similes, metaphors, or other imagery?
- In small groups, choose a topic from the list below and reread the poems in that category. Discuss how the poems work together. What new knowledge do you get from each poem? Are there any similarities or themes found in more than one poem on the same topic? What other things do you notice as you read?

Friendship

“My Best Echo”	“The Invitation Reversed”	“The Silent Drum”
“Two-Three Pulse”	“Amifriend del Alma”	“Stain”
“Mama Earths”	“More Than the Other”	“Recital”
“Cracked”	“Partners”	

Art

“Papa Drum”	“More Than Ever”	“World Drums Class”
“Puerto Rican Drum Dance”	“Showtime”	“Talking Drum”

Special Places

“Oakland Orange Sky”	“At Amanecer Community School Science Fair”	“La Peña Café”
“On Our Drive to School”		“Solstice Locust Lake”
“At Amanecer Community School”		“Oakland to EL-A”

Moon

“Luna”	“Amiga Luna”	“First Blood Ritual”
“Moon Ceremony”	“A Circle of Light”	“Midnight Light”
“What Pulls Us”		

Gender-Expansiveness

“Boyness”	“Amifriend del Alma”	“Xochihuah in Concrete”
“A Boy Like Him”	“No Bad Without Good”	“Luna Reigns”
“La Peña Café”	“Echo Movement”	“The Xochitl Ritual”
“Not Magda”	“More Than the Other”	“Ometeotl”

Body Changes & Reactions

“Moon Ceremony”	“Tulips in the Mirror”	“A Wide-Open Clasp”
“A Closet Full”	“Mima’s Moon”	“Hummingbird Herbs”
“My Flower, Mi Flor”	“Moonshadow”	“Chrysalis”
“Paper Walls”	“Moon Has Come”	“First Blood Ritual”
“Pieces of Us”		

Connection with the Ancestors

“Moon Ceremony”	“Hammock Limpia”	“A Circle of Light”
“Mima’s Herbs”	“Preparations”	“The Cleansing”
“Showtime”	“Together”	“First Blood Ritual”
“Not Magda”		

Identity

“Black-Xican”	“On the Blanket”	“Rhythm”
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RESOURCES

RESOURCES ON MOON CEREMONIES, MENSTRUATION, AND CONNECTING WITH YOUR BODY

1. **Podcast:** “Let there be Luz” Moon Cycle Series Introduction episode by Linda García (also known as Luz Warrior)
<https://www.lettherebeluz.com/episodes/>
2. **Poem:** “A Flower Song for Maidens Coming of Age” c.1440 in *Songs of Ditzbalché 7; Flower, Song, Dance: Aztec and Mayan Poetry* (August 2013–2014) by David Bowles (translator)
3. **Books:** *Grandmothers of the Light: A Medicine Woman’s Sourcebook* by Paula Gunn Allen
The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions by Paula Gunn Allen
The Guide, Period by Naama Bloom
Voices from Our Ancestors: Xicanx and Latinx Spiritual Expressions and Healing Practices Edited by Lara Medina and Martha R. Gonzales
Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype by Clarissa Pinkola Estés
Becoming Peers: Mentoring Girls Into Womanhood by DeAnna L’am
Moon Mother, Moon Daughter by Janet Lucy and Terri Allison
Reaching for the Moon by Lucy H. Pearce
4. **Zine:** *Ancestral Spiritual Resistance: Promises and Offerings* (English)/ *Resistencia Ancestral: Promesas y Ofrendas* (Spanish) Edited by Mayda Del Valle
<https://mijente.net/2017/11/02/ancestral-spiritual-resistance-zine/>

RESOURCES ON GENDER-EXPANSIVENESS

1. Human Rights Campaign Resources on Gender-Expansive Children and Youth
<https://www.hrc.org/resources/resources-on-gender-expansive-children-and-youth>
2. Human Rights Campaign Great Diverse Children’s Books with Transgender, Non-Binary and Gender Expansive Children
<http://www.welcomingschools.org/pages/looking-at-gender-identity-with-childrens-books/>
3. Teaching Tolerance Toolkit for “Being There for Nonbinary Youth”
<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2016/toolkit-for-being-there-for-nonbinary-youth>
4. Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) Gender Terminology
<https://www.glsen.org/article/gender-terminology>
5. “A Place in the Middle” Film and Classroom Discussion Guide: A Strength-Based Approach to Gender Diversity and Inclusion
<https://aplaceinthemiddle.org/>

RESOURCES ON COMMUNITY SPACES, ANCESTOR KNOWLEDGE, AND BOMBA MUSIC

1. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings: Puerto Rican Bomba and Plena
<https://folkways.si.edu/puerto-rican-bomba-plena-shared-traditions-distinct-rhythms/latin-world/music/article/smithsonian>
2. Los Pleneros de la 21 <https://www.losplenerosdela21.org/>
3. La Peña Cultural Center <https://lapena.org/>
4. Mujeres de Maíz <https://www.mujeresdemaiz.com>
5. Harriet’s Apothecary <http://www.harrietsapothecary.com/>
6. Ancestral Apothecary <https://ancestralapothecaryschool.com/>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aida Salazar is a writer, arts advocate, and homeschooling mother who grew up in South East Los Angeles. She received an MFA in Writing from the California Institute of the Arts, and her writings have appeared in publications such as the *Huffington Post*, *Women and Performance: Journal of Feminist Theory*, and *Huizache Magazine*. Her short story “By the Light of the Moon” was adapted into a ballet by the Sonoma Conservatory of Dance and is the first Xicana-themed ballet in history. She is a member of Las Musas, a collective of women and nonbinary Latinx authors. Aida lives with her family of artists in a teal house in Oakland, California.

GUIDE AUTHOR

This guide was written by Dr. Carla España, who is a Bilingual Education Clinical Doctor Lecturer at Hunter College, The City University of New York. She is also an Educator Collaborative K–12 Literacy Professional Development Fellow.