

Dear Teacher,

Meet Jaya, Maria, and Lola. At first glance, they may seem to be just like other eighth-grade girls you know. They want to go to the spring dance, and they love sharing frappes with their best friends after school and complaining about the other kids. But there's one big difference: all three are daughters of maid's or nannies. As tensions about immigrants start to erupt in the wealthy suburb of Meadowbrook, New Jersey, that they call home, their small, fragile world collapses. Each of them must learn to find a place for themselves and reimagine their relationships with their mothers.

Jaya, Maria, and Lola's story is a heartbreaking and eye-opening story of friendship, belonging, and finding the way home. It is a story that explores themes of immigration, class, race, and teenage relationships in contemporary America.

We've made it easy for you to teach this novel that *The New York Times* calls "a fresh perspective on suburban American life. . . elevated by writing that is intelligent and earnestly passionate." In this guide, you will find:

- A discussion guide with engaging questions for your classroom
- Some recommended titles for paired readings
- An insightful Q&A with the author

Happy Reading!

" . . . A substantive, timely read about the current state of immigrants in the U.S."

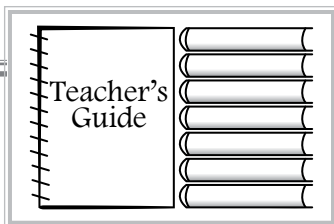
—*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*



By Marina Budhos
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Simon & Schuster



Discussion Guide



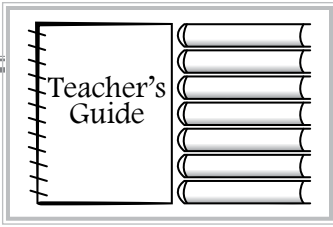
Book Trailer



Watch the book trailer for *Tell Us We're Home*, which features Marina Budhos introducing the main characters of the novel.

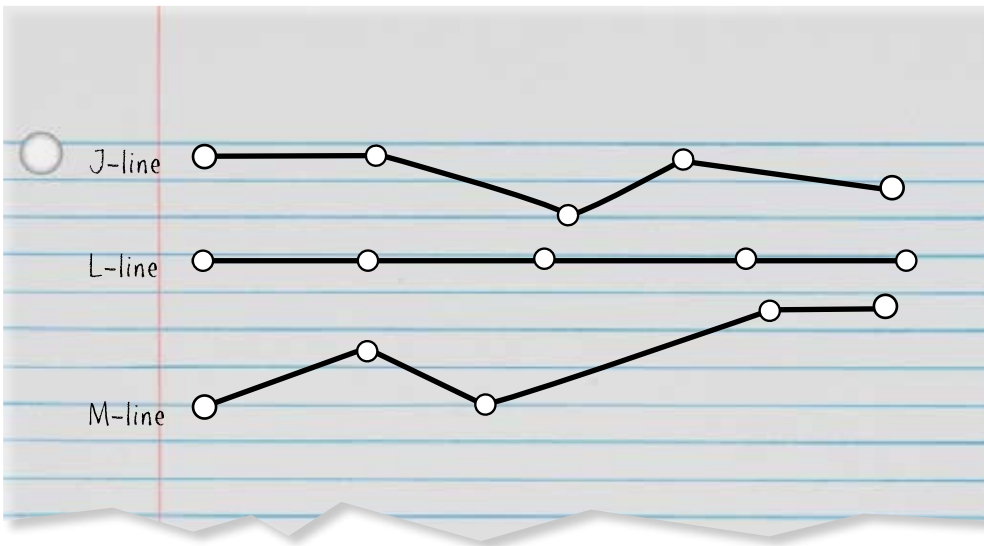
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LslvFI6mNGg>

1. The three main characters in this book are best friends whose mothers are immigrant nannies or maids in the well-to-do town of Meadowbrook, NJ. They each have access to people's houses through their mother's work. What do they notice? What does this reveal about class? About America?
2. As daughters of working-class immigrants, the three girls have different boundaries and rules to follow than many of their classmates. What does "responsibility" mean to Jaya, Lola, and Maria?
3. Renaldo and his Spanish-speaking friends have a confrontation with the lacrosse team at Grove Field in Chapter 3. What are the underlying tensions that lead to this conflict? What picture does this give of Meadowbrook?
4. Each of the girls in this novel has a "window" through which she sees the other side of Meadowbrook. Jaya has Mrs. Harmon. Maria has Tash. And Lola has Anthony Vitale. What do they learn from these relationships and how does seeing Meadowbrook through different eyes change them?
5. Discuss the use of clothes in the novel and what they reveal about social place.
6. Chapter 48 opens with the line, "It isn't hard, if you're a daughter of a maid or nanny, to become one. . ." How do Jaya, Maria, and Lola use their experiences as a tool to solve the mystery of the missing earring and to clear Mrs. Lal's name?
7. As you were watching the story unfold, what was your opinion of Mrs. Lal? Did you doubt her innocence (like Jaya) or were you convinced that she was innocent (like Lola)? Why or why not?
8. Jaya wants to ask Mrs. Harmon, "How do you feel like you belong?" By the end of the novel, how do you think she and her friends answer this question? What does home mean to them?
9. "This country was hard and soft. You smashed your heart on its hardness and you knew, to survive, you'd break some hearts too." Discuss Maria's reflection, then find quotes that show different views of America in the novel. What does being American mean to you?
10. "She's trying to do what's best for you," Mrs. Harmon tells Jaya about her mother. How is what Mrs. Lal wants for Jaya the same or different than what Jaya wants for her life? What dreams do the mothers and daughters in this book have for one another?



Stops Along a Journey

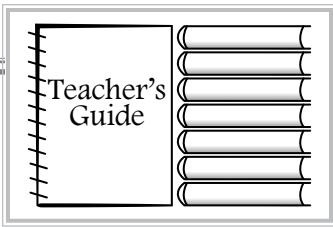
Jaya, Maria, and Lola each go on a journey in this novel. Their journeys pull them away and bring them back to their friends and mothers. Each of the stops along this journey represent the challenges they face. Work in pairs to identify these stops and to find quotes that describe each characters' stops along this journey. How are the three girls similar? How are they different?



Make a drawing of the “social constellations” of Meadowbrook.

What kinds of conflicts exist between these groups? What objects do you associate with each of these groups?

A hand-drawn Venn diagram consisting of three overlapping circles on lined paper. The circles are arranged in a triangular pattern, with each circle overlapping the other two.



Quote Search

Discuss the main themes of the novel through the lens of each of these quotes. Then, find quotes or passages from the book that further explore these themes.

Belonging

"They could be outside together. In fact, they forgot they were outside at all."

Mother-Daughter

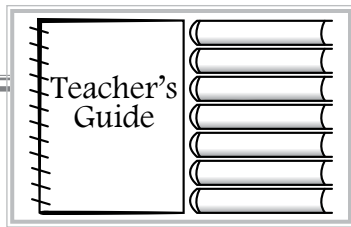
"But as they strolled, she became aware of something growing between them, an angry shadow, thick as vines."—Jaya

Class

"His parents gave him back his own self, strung from these beautiful images, and crafted into a story." —Maria

Immigration

"This was a lonely land of firsts, where no one, not even your parents, could help you cross over." —Lola



Paired Readings

These books explore coming-of-age through the lens of immigration, race, and class and would make valuable companion reads to *Tell Us We're Home*.



WATCH *Spanglish*

Flor and her daughter, Cristina have recently emigrated to LA from Mexico

and are trying to find a better life. When she takes a live-in housekeeping job with a family, Flor has to fight for her daughter's soul as she adjusts to life in a new country.

TAKE ACTION Not in Our Town

Visit <http://www.niot.org/> to learn about starting a community or school-based campaign to stop hate, address bullying, and build safe, inclusive communities for all.



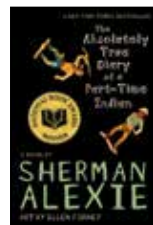
Ask Me No Questions By Marina Budhos

For years since emigrating from Bangladesh, Nadira and her family have lived on expired visas in New York City, hoping they could someday realize their dream of becoming legal citizens of the United States. But after 9/11, everything changes.



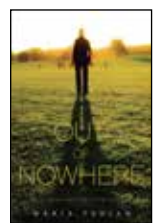
Remix: Conversations with Immigrant Teenagers By Marina Budhos

For two-and-a-half years, Budhos interviewed immigrant teenagers from around the country. This book contains fourteen in-depth profiles of immigrant teens, told solely in the immigrants' own words.



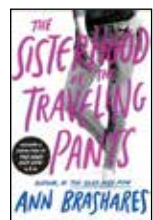
The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian By Sherman Alexie

Based on the author's experiences growing up on a reservation, this National Book Award-winning novel chronicles the adolescence of a Native American boy who makes a daring life choice to attend an all-white school—a decision that changes his life.



Out of Nowhere By Maria Padian

When Somali refugees move to a small Maine town and quickly rise on the high school soccer team, class, race, and language tensions break out. Based on real events, this story follows high school senior Tom Bouchard who finds himself caught in the middle between his new immigrant teammates and threatened locals and family.



The Sisterhood of Traveling Pants By Ann Brashares

Four girls with very different backgrounds and personalities make a pact to share a pair of thrift-store jeans over the course of a summer. The interwoven stories told from each girl's point of view explore family and friendship in a coming-of-age novel that inspired *Tell Us We're Home*.



Q & A with Marina Budhos

Q. Why did you choose the lens of adolescence to talk about larger issues of class and immigration?

A. I am interested in contemporary stories that meld in larger issues, often of teenagers who might be invisible, or outsiders. When I became a mother, I hired a nanny, who was also the same background as me, on one side (Indo-Guyanese). At times, she was mistaken for my son's mother, or I was mistaken for being a nanny. I would melt into the side of the playground benches, where the nannies sat, and I could listen. We were something like sisters, but I was also aware of the stark differences. I interviewed quite a few nannies about their lives. Somewhere along the way I became fascinated by their children and how they felt. One day I was visiting a nanny in her home—which was, literally, a basement where my head touched the pipes—and her son came in and went to his bedroom behind a little curtain. I just could not stop thinking about this kid, and all the others, who are hidden behind the women who help us get on with our lives. This coincided with my moving to the suburbs and noticing how much our lives here—in what feels like typical American suburbs—are dependent on immigrants.

Q: How did you decide to write *Tell Us We're Home* from three different points of view?

A: At the very beginning of working on the book I had tried it from Jaya's point of view, but that felt much too constricting. This story needed to be told "in the round" as each of these girls gives you something different as a daughter of a maid or nanny. My challenge was to take you inside each girl's world as evocatively as possible, but allow you to move between them with a slightly wider angle. I read *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* because I admired how Anne Brashares moved in and out of the three girls in short bursts. In my process, this became like a kind of film cutting where I would move scenes around and see what kind of tension could be built with these parallel, developing stories. The structure then became the arc of each girl and how they cope with a difficult situation, how it exposes the frailties in their lives, and the little, important insights they gain along the way. The other thing I really enjoyed about writing the novel was the fact that I had three very different immigrant worlds to capture. It was great fun—sinking into each distinct setting with its own set of secondary characters, textures, memories.

Q. *Tell Us We're Home* focuses on finding the American Dream. What are some things that many citizens take for granted that immigrants have to struggle to find?

A. The most basic is simply a sense of home, of place, and of belonging. From a teenage perspective, it's an ease in the culture, and a more easygoing attitude on the parts of their parents—they're allowed to do a lot more, even simply hang out after school. They may be experiencing their own teenage angst, but they basically know what the rules are, even what their future might look like. All of this is being invented by an immigrant family. Sometimes an immigrant teenager is the one who is paving the way for their parents. So they can't take for granted that their parents even know how to do simple things, such as deal with a government bureaucracy, or a school, or give them advice on what's ahead or even how to achieve the American Dream. For some immigrants, they are working so hard just to survive, to get their foothold, it's difficult to really see where the American Dream lies.