Bodega Dreams by Ernesto Quiñonez

The word is out in Spanish Harlem: Willy Bodega is king. Need college tuition for your daughter? Start-up funds for your fruit stand? Bodega can help. He gives everyone a leg up, in exchange only for loyalty—and a steady income from the drugs he pushes. Chino is drawn to Bodega’s street-smart idealism, but soon finds himself over his head, navigating an underworld of switchblade tempers, turncoat morality, and murder.


About the Author: Ernesto Quiñonez is the author of Bodega Dreams, which was chosen as a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers title as well as a Borders Bookstore Original New Voice selection. He lives in Harlem. (HarperCollins Publishers)

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is the book called “Bodega Dreams”?

2. The character Sapo seemed to be the baddest person within the school. Why do you think that he decides to act this way? Do you think other people act this way and why?

3. Why does Mr. Blessington put down the students so much?

4. What is your opinion of Sapo and Chino’s friendship? How far does friendship go? What would you do if you were Chino?

5. When Chino says that Spanish Harlem is “a slum that has been handed down from immigrant to immigrant, like used clothing worn and reworn, stitched and restitched by different ethnic groups who continue to pass it on” (p. 161). What social issues is he talking about?

6. After Chino is questioned by the police, Blanca leaves him, saying “You could’ve told me the truth from the beginning and still counted on me” (p. 180). Do you think Blanca really would have stood by Chino if she knew the truth from the beginning? Who else in the novel tells lies to protect people? Is it ever justifiable to lie to protect the ones you love?

7. Towards the end of the novel, Chino explains that, “…I knew Bodega was lost. His dreams about the neighborhood had been too close to his love for Vera, incestuous cousins that had no right getting involved” (p. 192). What is Chino saying here? Is he right? Is Bodega’s failure to save East Harlem the result of his love for Vera? To what extent can you blame someone else for your own failures?

8. What are some of the battle cries for the “futurists” that Chino learns about in his senior year? What does Chino think of them? What do you think about the “Futurist” ideals?

9. Within the first round, Chino often mentions his heritage. Give a few examples of this. What is the importance of recognizing Puerto Rican history for Chino?
10. What does Chino mean when he says, “You want something from me then you better have something I need” (47)? What does he need? Why?

(Questions issued by publisher.)