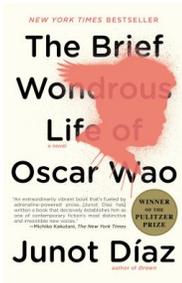


Books by the Stack



The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Díaz

Oscar is a sweet but disastrously overweight ghetto nerd who dreams of becoming the Dominican J.R.R. Tolkien and, most of all, finding love. Encapsulating Dominican-American history, Díaz opens our eyes to a vision of the American experience and explores the human capacity to persevere in the name of love.

Why you'll like it: *Awkward adolescence. Funny. Emotional. Spanglish.*

About the Author: Junot Díaz was born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic and was raised in New Jersey. His fiction has appeared in numerous publications including *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *African Voices*, and *Best American Short Stories*. He wrote the story collection *Drown* and the novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which won the John Sargent Sr. First Novel Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize and the 2008 Pulitzer Prize. He is a professor of creative writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. Throughout the novel, Spanish words and phrases appear unaccompanied by their English translations. What is the effect of the seamless blending of Spanish and English?
2. Díaz, in the voice of the narrator, often employs footnotes to explain the history or context of a certain passage or sentence in the main text. Why do you think he chose to convey historical facts and anecdotes in footnote form? How would the novel have read differently if the content of the footnotes had been integrated into the main text? What if the footnotes and the information in them had been eliminated all together.
3. The book centers on the story of Oscar and his family, yet the majority of the book is narrated by Yunior, who is not part of the family, and only plays a relatively minor role in the events of the story. Yunior even calls himself “The Watcher,” underscoring his outsider status in the story. What is the effect of having a relative outsider tell the story of Oscar and his family, rather than someone in the family tell it?
4. In many ways, Yunior and Oscar are polar opposites. Is it fair to say the Yunior is Oscar's foil – underscoring everything Oscar is not – and vice versa? Or are they more alike than they seem?
5. Yunior characterizes himself as a super macho, womanizing jock-type, yet while narrating he references nerdy topics such as the *Fantastic Four* and *Lord of the Rings*. What is the author trying to say by making Yunior's character contradictory?
6. Oscar's obsession with fantasy and science fiction becomes isolating, separating him from his peers so much that he almost cannot communicate with them. How are others characters in the book similarly isolated?

- 7.** As the title suggests, Oscar is destined to die during the course of the book. Why do you think the author chose to reveal this from the beginning? Did it make the book more suspenseful, knowing Oscar was going to die?
- 8.** The author, the narrator, and the protagonist are all male, but some of the strongest characters and voices in the book are female. Do you think Diaz is as successful in creating the female narrator as he is the male one?
- 9.** How much of her own story do you think Belicia shared with her children? How much do you think Belicia knew about her father's Abelard's story?
- 10.** While Oscar's story is central to the novel, the book is not told in his voice. Who do you consider the true protagonist of the book? Oscar? Yunior? Belicia?

