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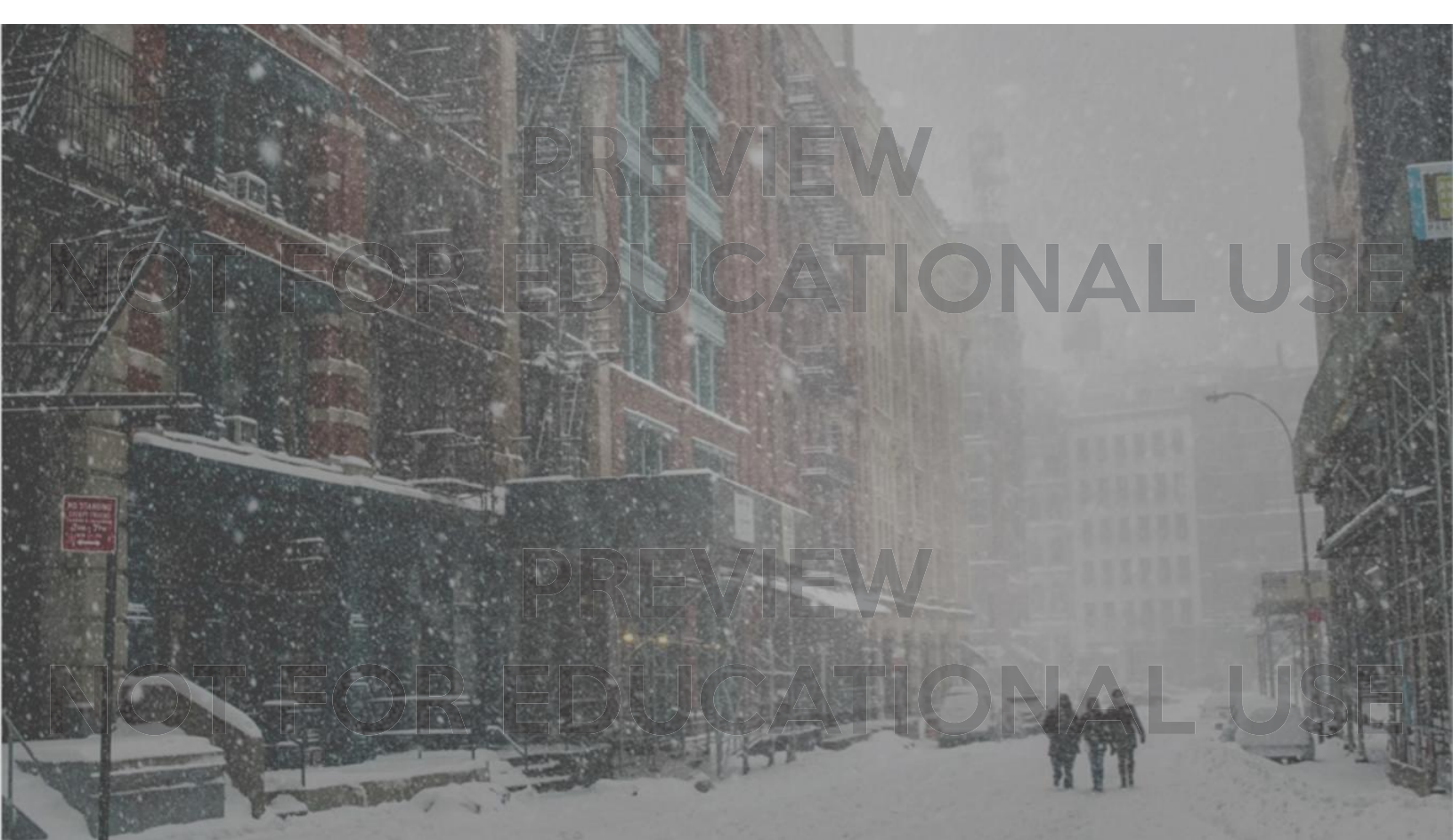
# *Snow*

BY JULIA ALVAREZ

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# 3-2-1

1) What are the first **THREE** words that pop into your head when you see this photo?

2) What **TWO** emotions do you feel when you look at this photo? Explain.

3) What is **ONE** question you have about this photo?

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# Julia Álvarez

- Julia Álvarez was born in the United States, but her family returned to their native country, Dominican Republic, shortly after her birth.
- Álvarez grew up in the Dominican Republic until an unsafe political climate forced her family to flee to New York. She was ten years old.
- Álvarez returned to the United States without knowing how to speak English.
- As a young adult, she dealt with homesickness, prejudice, and isolation.
- Her experiences as an immigrant inspired much of her work as she found comfort in writing and exploring her identity.
- “Snow” is a short excerpt from her acclaimed novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, published in 1991.
- Today, Julia Álvarez is a renowned poet and novelist. Some of her most famous works include: *In the Time of Butterflies*, *The Secret Footprints*, *Before We Were Free*, *¡Yo!*, *Saving the World*, and *Once Upon A Quinceañera*.

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### Setting

- The story “Snow” takes place in New York City during the 1960s, while President John F. Kennedy was still in office (1961-1963).
- Kennedy's administration included high tensions with communist states in the Cold War.
- In 1962, the Soviet Union began to secretly install missiles in Cuba to launch attacks on U.S. cities. The resulting period of tension is known as the “Cuban Missile Crisis.”
- This crisis brought the world closer to nuclear war than at any point before or after.
- Kennedy assumed that his only option was to prepare the country for nuclear war, which he personally thought had a one-in-five chance of occurring.
- President John F. Kennedy recommended all Americans prepare by building bomb shelters.
- Underground shelters were meant to help anyone avoid exposure to harmful radioactive fallout from a nuclear blast and its likely aftermath of radiation.
- When a nuclear device is exploded, a large fireball is created destroying everything inside.
- Exposure to extremely large doses of radiation causes death within a few days or months.
- Even breathing or eating food contaminated with radioactive fallout may lead to an increased risk of developing cancer and other health effects later in life.



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peculiar

- adjective
- describes strange, odd, or unusual

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# mourning

- noun
- black clothes worn as an expression of grief when someone dies



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# immigrant

- noun
- a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country



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**enunciate**

- verb
- to say or pronounce clearly

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# holocaust

- noun
- destruction on a mass scale, especially caused by fire or nuclear war

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# ominous

- adjective
- describes the feeling that something bad is going to happen; threatening



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**rosary**

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- noun
- in the Roman Catholic Religion, rosary is a series of prayers counted off on a special set of beads

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Name:

Date:

### Before Reading

**Directions:** Look at the photo and answer the questions that follow.



1) What are the first **THREE** words that pop into your head when you see this photo?

2) What **TWO** emotions do you feel when you look at this photo? Explain.

3) What is **ONE** question you have about this photo?



Name:  
"Snow" by Julia Álvarez

Date:  
Vocabulary

Word	Part of Speech	Definition
peculiar	adjective	
mourning	noun	
immigrant	noun	
enunciate	verb	
holocaust	noun	
ominous	adjective	
rosary	noun	

Name:

Date:

"Snow" by Julia Álvarez

Literary Analysis Questions

Answer the following questions with complete sentences.

1. Who is telling the story? What do you know about her/him?



2. What first set of English words does Yolanda learn? How are they **symbolic** of American culture?

3. During an air-raid drill, what do Yolanda and her classmates imagine? Why?

4. What second list of vocabulary words does Yolanda mention? How do these words compare with the first list? How might learning these words impact an immigrant such as Yolanda?

5. Why would Yolanda misunderstand the falling of snow as the fallout from a nuclear bomb? Use textual evidence to support your answer.

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6. What is the overall **tone** of the story? Use textual evidence to support your answer.

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7. At the end of the passage, Sister Zoe describes snowflakes for Yolanda. What deeper message is she trying to convey by describing snow in this manner? What **inferences** can you make about Sister Zoe's personality?

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8. What is the **author's purpose** in writing this passage?

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9. How does the **point of view** affect the plot of the story?

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10. What is the **theme** of the story? Use textual evidence to support your answer.

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Name:

Date:

"Snow" by Julia Álvarez  
After Reading Worksheet

**Directions:** Discuss the following list of challenges that immigrants or refugees face by relocating to a new country. In the box below, re-list the items in order of what you perceive to be the most difficult obstacle (number 1) to the least difficult obstacle (number 10). Feel free to add more ideas to the list if there's something not mentioned.

- Difficulty speaking and learning English
- Work and Earning Money
- Securing Housing
- School/Education
- Transportation
- Cultural barriers and unfamiliar traditions
- Prejudice
- Physical Safety
- Socialization
- Homesickness

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.



If someone moved to the United States from another country today, what are four words you think they should know immediately? Explain each answer.

1.

2.

3.

4.

The **setting** of this story exemplifies the fear Americans felt during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Can you think of another period in history that represents a time when people lived in fear? How is it similar? How is it different?

***"Snow" from How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents***  
**By Julia Álvarez**  
**Suggested Lesson Procedure**

1. Facilitate the Before Reading activity for the short story "Snow." Project the image of a snowy evening in New York City using the Powerpoint presentation. (The photo is also on the worksheet. No color printer is necessary.)

Encourage students to examine the image for details and answer the "3-2-1" questions that follow. This activating strategy will allow students to make personal and real world connections with concepts from the text.

After students have been allowed 3-5 minutes for their written responses, ask for volunteers to share their entries with the rest of the class. Probe further, "Why would that apply to this image?" Or "What might someone think about this picture if they've never seen snow before?"

2. Review the vocabulary terms and background information with students using the Powerpoint presentation. Students should copy the definitions into their graphic organizers.

3. Read the short story "Snow" by Julia Alvarez (this takes about 3 minutes without stopping). I prefer to read the text aloud as a whole class, or play the audio version for students. Here is a link I found: [Audio Short Story Snow](#)

4. Assign the literary analysis questions. Students may complete this independently or in pairs. If you have time, review the answers as a class; otherwise, collect worksheets from students when they are done.

5. Direct students to work on the after reading activities. I recommend letting students work in groups of 3-4. Once students are done working, ask each group to share some of their answers with the rest of the class and engage in a purposeful discussion.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to email me at  
[chompingatthelit@gmail.com](mailto:chompingatthelit@gmail.com)

## Before Reading

**Directions:** Look at the photo and answer the questions that follow.

**Answers will vary.**



1) What are the first **THREE** words that pop into your head when you see this photo?

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Vocabulary  
"Snow" by Julia Álvarez

Word	Part of Speech	Definition
peculiar	adjective	Describes strange, odd, or unusual
mourning	noun	black clothes worn as an expression of grief when someone dies
immigrant	noun	a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country
enunciate	verb	To say or pronounce clearly
holocaust	noun	destruction on a mass scale, especially caused by fire or nuclear war
ominous	adjective	Describes the feeling that something bad is going to happen; threatening
rosary	noun	in the Roman Catholic Religion, rosary is a series of prayers counted off on a special set of beads

**"Snow" by Julia Álvarez**  
**Literary Analysis Questions**  
**Answer Key**



1. Who is telling the story? What do you know about her/him?

Yolanda is narrating the story. She is a young immigrant girl who has just moved from another country to New York. She does not speak English and she is attending Catholic school. Her family does not have a lot of money as they rent a small apartment. Yolanda is in fourth grade and likes her teacher Sister Zoe.

2. What first set of English words does Yolanda learn? How are they symbolic of American culture?

Yolanda learns: laundromat, cornflakes, subway, and snow. These terms represent American culture as well as city life during the 1960s. Many New Yorkers used the subway for transportation and see snow every winter undoubtedly. Cornflakes is the name of a cereal and a popular food item at the time. Many Americans washed their clothing at laundromats, especially if they could not afford a washer and dryer at home. Many countries do not have Cornflakes, underground transportation, or laundromats, nor do some ever see snow; so these details are distinct of the United States. (Fun fact: As of 2022, 35,000 laundromats are operational in the United States, and they generate more than \$5 billion in revenue each year.)

3. During an air-raid drill, what do Yolanda and her classmates imagine? Why?

Yolanda states, they would "imagine our hair falling out, the bones in our arms going soft." The kids imagine this because they think about what it would be like if they were to be affected by radiation as a result of a nuclear bomb. These horrible thoughts represent what it was like to live in fear of an impending war and how it affected many Americans.

4. What second list of vocabulary words does Yolanda mention? How do these words compare with the first list? How might learning these words impact an immigrant such as Yolanda?

Yolanda learns the words: holocaust, nuclear bomb, radioactive fallout, and bomb shelter. These words are much more serious than the first list, which feels harmless. The new words represent danger, fear, death, and alarm. Yolanda is already anxious because she is out of place in a culture and society that is unfamiliar to her. To add to



the strangeness of a new life, she now has to worry about a possible nuclear fallout in New York. It's frightening to her because she left her country to escape peril, yet she still feels like she is in danger.

5. Why would Yolanda misunderstand the falling of snow as the fallout from a nuclear bomb? Use textual evidence to support your answer.

"Sister Zoe drew a picture of a mushroom on the blackboard and dotted a flurry of chalk marks for the dusty fallout that would kill us all." Yolanda has never seen snow before, but all that anyone can talk about (at school, at home, on the television) is the possible nuclear war. At school, the students are consistently exposed to air raid drills instilling fear for a nuclear bomb. Yolanda assumes the snow is the fallout just as Sister Zoe had shown her on the chalkboard.

6. What is the overall tone of the story? Use textual evidence to support your answer.

The tone is threatening, sad, ominous, and emotional. The discussion of "death" and "war" establishes a threatening tone. Yolanda describes the teachers as dressed like "dolls in mourning" and the description of Yolanda's family holding rosary beads praying for peace gives an ominous and emotional tone. Lastly, the cries and shrieks of the class when they think there is a bomb gives the story a distressed tone. "A few girls began to cry."

7. At the end of the passage, Sister Zoe describes snowflakes for Yolanda. What deeper message is she trying to convey by describing snow in this manner? What inferences can you make about Sister Zoe's personality?

Sister Zoe tells Yolanda that each snowfall is different, like a person. Sister Zoe is trying to tell Yolanda that she is also beautiful and irreplaceable. Sister Zoe deeply cares for Yolanda; she is observant and caring. Sister Zoe recognizes that Yolanda feels out of place in society, and reminds her that she is beautiful.

8. What is the author's purpose in writing this passage?

The author's purpose is to make readers appreciate life from someone else's perspective and understand the view of an immigrant girl who is learning English during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

9. How does the point of view affect the plot of the story?

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The story is told in first person point of view which gives the readers a deeper understanding of what it is like for a young immigrant to be immersed in an unfamiliar culture. Because Yolanda has never seen snow before, she mistakes the snowflakes as a bomb, creating a terrifying situation for the class. She's quick to make this mistake because the country instilled a fear in everyone that war is coming. Yolanda's youth also justifies how and why she could make this mistake. The fact that Yolanda is just a child adds to the devastating truth that even children were impacted by the Cuban Missile Crisis and even children were worrying about worldly affairs outside of their control.

10. What is the theme of the story? Use textual evidence to support your answer.

- It is human nature for people to fear things that are out of their control, but compassion from other people can make the situations easier.
- When people transition into a new environment, it is a survival instinct to defend one's self against assumed dangers.

Yolanda recently moved to New York and did not know what snow looked like. Sister Zoe comforts Yolanda when Yolanda is frightened.

"Why, Yolanda dear, that's snow!" She laughed. "Snow." Sister Zoe was able to deescalate a terrifying situation.

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### After Reading Worksheet

Answers will vary for all.

Directions: Discuss the following list of challenges that immigrants or refugees face by relocating to a new country. In the box below, re-list the items in order of what you perceive to be the most difficult obstacle (number 1) to the least difficult obstacle (number 10). Feel free to add more ideas to the list if there's something not mentioned.

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- 1.
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- 3.
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- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

If someone moved to the United States from another country today, what are four words you think they should know immediately? Explain each answer.

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The setting of this story exemplifies the fear Americans felt during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Can you think of another period in history that represents a time when people lived in fear? How is it similar? How is it different?

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