



## STANDARD-BASED CONNECTIONS

The Common Core Standards push readers to look closer when reading a text, including examining author's craft and analyzing word choice and narrative elements. *Water in May* includes complex characters, specific word choice, and a well-crafted plot that allows the reader to delve deeply into the text. This teaching guide includes text-dependent questions and activities to be used in grades 9–12 in the English classroom in literature circles or reading groups, as an independent novel, during a novel study, as a mentor text with passages used in classrooms, as a starting point for a research project, or as a combination of any of these. *Water in May* also includes a storyline and specific passages that would be beneficial to use in a science, health, or life management classroom. The activities and questions for the text are written in a way that they can be taken and given to students as they are.

Activities and questions throughout this guide correlate to the following standards:

**English Language Arts Common Core Standards: Reading** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9–12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9–12.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9–12.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9–12.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9–12.5, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9–10.6, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9–10.7

**English Language Arts Common Core Standards: Writing** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9–12.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9–12.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9–12.8, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9–12.9

**English Language Arts Common Core Standards: Science & Technical Subjects** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.9–12.9, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11–12.7

**Next Generation Science Standards: Life Sciences** HS-LS1–2, HS-LS3–1

**English Language Arts Common Core Standards: History/Social Studies** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9–12.3

**National Standards for Learning Language** 2.1, 4.1, 4.2

**National Sexuality Education Standards** PR.12.INF.2, PR.12.INF.3, PR.12.DM.2, PR.12.CC.6

**National Health Education Standards** 3.12.4, 6.12.4

## TEXT-DEPENDENT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND CLASSROOM EXTENSIONS

Use these text-dependent questions and cross-curricular activities to extend your students' experience with *Water in May* in the English, Science, Government, Foreign Language, Sexuality Education, or Health classroom. Some of activities and questions include spoilers for the novel.

- Mari has a very specific reason for wanting a child, which she shares with us even before we know her backstory, and the readers soon realize that Mari's lack of a loving household and absent parents definitely had an impact on her. What does Mari's longing for a child show us about Mari as a character, about her outlook on life, and about her self-worth?
- Reread pages 6–11 and 41–48, when Bertie is introduced to the reader. What can you infer about Bertie based on these first two introductions? Is your inference correct? How does Bertie do better than expected in the end? What other characters were different than you first assumed?
- Do you feel the inclusion of the glossary was helpful? Would context be enough to determine the meaning of all unknown words without it?
- All cultures have unique idioms. "Water in May" is shared as a Spanish idiom in the novel on page thirty-six. What does it essentially mean?
  - o Why did the author choose this saying as the title of the book? How does it embody the entire story?
  - o Choose an idiom from another country and create a visual with information on the idioms history, its figurative meaning, and its American equivalent if there is one.
- There are numerous Spanish-language dialects spoken across varying countries and cultures. This can be seen in *Water in May* right in the glossary of Dominican slang, when the author indicates general Spanish or Mexican. Use Alta's Beyond Words blog ([altalang.com/beyond-words](http://altalang.com/beyond-words)) and other resources to create a map showing dialects of Spanish spoken throughout the world.
- The author chose to include multiple tragedies along Mari and Angelo's journey, including her sexual assault and Amelia's death. How did the inclusion of these tragedies affect the mood of the narrative? How would removing these tragedies change the story?
- Each of Mari's friends plays a role in her development. Split up into three groups, one for each of her friends, and assign each group a friend to advocate for in a "court of law" showing how their character helped Mari more than hurt her. Be sure to prepare claims, supporting evidence, and rebuttals for what other groups may say about your character.
- Although the secondary characters in the novel are developed to an extent, many questions about them remain. Pick a secondary character and make a list of questions you have about the character's past, present, and future.

## TEXT-DEPENDENT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND CLASSROOM EXTENSIONS

- When she is homeless, Mari is sexually assaulted. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, homeless youth are often the victims of sexual violence. NSVRC created an infographic to bring attention to these statistics: [nsvrc.org/publications/nsvrc-publications-infographic/homeless-youth-sexual-violence-infographic](http://nsvrc.org/publications/nsvrc-publications-infographic/homeless-youth-sexual-violence-infographic). Women of color experience sexual violence at a much higher rate than white women. Research information on sexual assault and Latinx women and created an infographic like the NSVRC did.
- Mari has been put in a very adult situation with her pregnancy; however, she is still only fifteen years old. She shows her age in many different ways. Find examples from the book where you feel Mari's expectations about her situation are unrealistic. Do you believe that her optimism is out of a need to protect herself, ignorance of the real world and consequences of choices, or some other reason? How did her expectations propelled the story? If she'd been more realistic, how would the story be different?
- When she finds out about Angelo's heart condition at twenty-one weeks, Mari must make a tough choice. What landmark Supreme Court case comes into play here? What factors influence her decision?
- What is Congenital Heart Disease? Use the author's website as a starting point: [ismeewilliams.com/what-is-chd](http://ismeewilliams.com/what-is-chd). After reviewing information on CHD, its causes, and heart anatomy, choose one topic about CHD to research further. Create a public service ad using a video creator like Animoto, iMovie, or MovieMaker.
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's page about Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome: [cdc.gov/ncbddd/heartdefects/hlhs.html](http://cdc.gov/ncbddd/heartdefects/hlhs.html). Use this information to recreate the drawing that Dr. Love made for Mari on page thirty-two.
  - o Dr. Love, at Mari's thirty-second week appointment, explains that the hole that Angelo needs to stay open until the first procedure is done is closing. This hole is called the foramen ovale. Where is this located? How is the closing of this hole fatal to babies with HLHS? Use this information to recreate the drawing Dr. Love made for Mari on page 132.
- Angelo was born at thirty-six weeks. This fits the definition of preterm, or premature. Use the CDC website ([cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/pretermbirth.htm](http://cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/pretermbirth.htm)) or the March of Dimes website ([marchofdimes.org](http://marchofdimes.org)) to answer the following questions:
  - o What are risk factors for having a baby prematurely? Did Mari have any of those risk factors?
  - o What complications can arise when a baby is preterm? Why do these complications occur?
  - o What are some treatment options for a premature baby? What research is being done to help babies who are born prematurely?
  - o What is the difference between a NICU and PICU?

## TEXT-DEPENDENT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND CLASSROOM EXTENSIONS

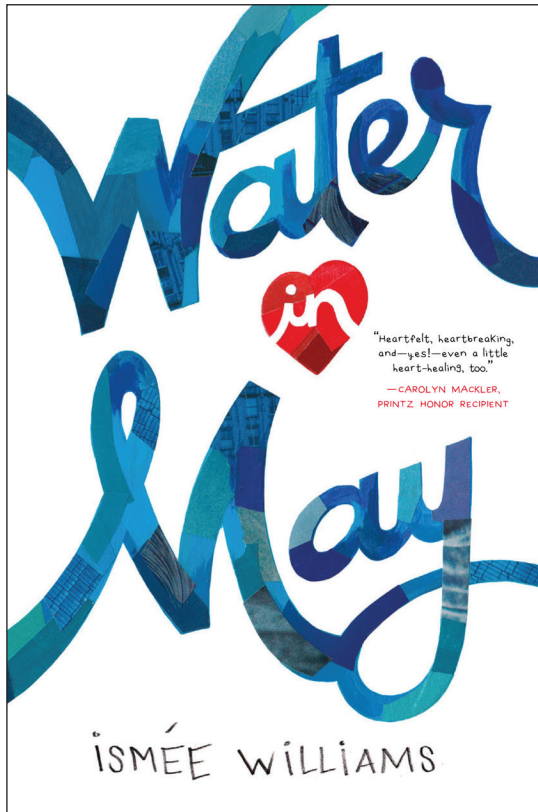
- Why do you think the author chose to skip eight months between the last chapter and the epilogue? How does this choice affect the conclusion of the novel?
  - Write a chapter that explains what happens in the months between the last chapter and the epilogue.
- The author employs first person point of view to tell this story. How does this choice impact the narrative and voice?
  - What is the cumulative impact of Mari's voice as the narrator, including her mix of Spanish and English?
  - Mari often describes other races in negative ways, including being ashamed of her white mother and automatically judging other race and cultures. She even states that she doesn't trust anyone with an accent. How does this word choice affect how Mari is perceived and how we perceive her world?
- What is Mari's go-to emotion? What other emotions do you think she is masking? Use text evidence to support this claim.
  - Create a graphic of your choosing that shows the emotions Mari experienced yet hid throughout *Water in May* with text evidence integrated in the graphic supporting each emotion.
- Create a visual representation of your choice to represent Mari's evolution as a character, inside and out.
  - One of the key drivers of Mari's anger at the world is the continual prejudice she feels. Throughout the book, she is discriminated against because of her gender, age, skin color, language, and ethnicity. Create a blackout poem ([scholastic.com/teachers/blog-posts/john-depasquale/blackout-poetry](http://scholastic.com/teachers/blog-posts/john-depasquale/blackout-poetry)) or other type of poems responding her experiences.
    - Within the story, Mari is sometimes seen as white instead of Dominican-American, and other times people assume she can't speak English. How does being biracial cause Mari to struggle with her identity and face even more prejudice from the outside world?
  - Now that Mari is home, what future struggle will she, Bertie, and Angelo face growing up?
  - New York State has many programs to help those in need. Look at the State of New York's social programs: [ny.gov/services/social-programs](http://ny.gov/services/social-programs). What programs would be beneficial to Mari even though she is not a fan of social workers?
    - Write a letter to Mari from the point of view of one of her friends, sharing the programs and asking her to get the help available to her.
    - Visit the website for social programs in your state and divide up programs between all students involved. Make a brochure sharing information about these programs.

## TEXT-DEPENDENT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND CLASSROOM EXTENSIONS

- The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services studies trends in teen pregnancy and childbearing: [hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/reproductive-health-and-teen-pregnancy/teen-pregnancy-and-childbearing/trends/index.html](https://hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/reproductive-health-and-teen-pregnancy/teen-pregnancy-and-childbearing/trends/index.html). How have the statistics changed over time?
  - What are the negative effects of teen childbearing? How does Mari, a child of teen parents, fit the negative effects listed? What can she do to break this cycle for Angelo?
- In a review, *Kirkus* states that *Water in May* “make[s] the reader reconsider assumptions about teen moms.” Do you agree with this statement? Do you believe that this was a goal of the author’s?
- How does the author develop the theme that “you can work through and overcome a tough situation through resilience” throughout the text? In the end, which secondary character proved this the most to Mari?
  - What other themes are developed in *Water in May*? How do all the themes in the story interact with each other?
- *Water in May* reflects the vision of We Need Diverse Books ([diversebooks.org](https://diversebooks.org))—where all readers can see themselves in the pages of a book. Complete a literary analysis essay, citing passages from the book, that shows the many different ways *Water in May* fits WNDB’s vision.
- How is the Dominican–American cultural experience presented in the text? Why do you think the author chose Mari to be Dominican–American and live in NYC?
  - How is the Dominican culture shared throughout *Water in May*?
  - View ten artworks by trailblazing Dominican female artists: [remezcla.com/lists/culture/dominican-art-history-trailblazing-female-artists](https://remezcla.com/lists/culture/dominican-art-history-trailblazing-female-artists). Pick one of the pieces of artwork and compare its representation of the Dominican culture to *Water in May*. What is emphasized in one work but not the other? How does this affect the outcome of what you as the reader take away?
  - *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo shares the experiences of Xiomara, a Dominican–American teen living in Harlem. After reading both novels, how do Mari’s and Xiomara’s experiences overlap and differ? Create a fictional scene where Mari and Xiomara meet and write dialogue of their interaction.
- Ismée Williams is a New York City pediatric cardiologist who currently works in the Bronx doing fetal cardiology. How can you see this profession in the author’s choices within the novel? How does her knowledge of pediatrics and cardiology enhance the reader’s experience?

# WATER IN MAY

Ismée Williams



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Ages 13 & up

## PRAISE

★ *“Fierce and tender—and absolutely worth reading.”*  
—Kirkus

*“The emotional core here is credible as well as dramatic.”*

—The Bulletin of the Center  
for Children’s Books

*“Realistic and compelling, heartfelt and heartbreaking all at the same time.”*  
—VOYA

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Fifteen-year-old Mari Pujols believes that the baby she’s carrying will finally mean she’ll have a family member who will love her deeply and won’t ever leave her—not like her mama, who took off when she was eight; or her papi, who’s in jail; or her abuela, who wants as little to do with her as possible. But when doctors discover a potentially fatal heart defect in the fetus, Mari faces choices she never could have imagined. Surrounded by her loyal girl crew, her off-and-on boyfriend, and a dedicated doctor, Mari navigates a decision that could emotionally cripple the bravest of women. It doesn’t take long to discover that both Mari and this sick baby have the strength to heal an entire family.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Ismée Williams** is a former pediatric cardiologist at Columbia University Medical Center in New York City. As the daughter of a Cuban immigrant, partially raised by her abuelos, her background helped her understand the many Maris she met along the way. *Water in May* is her first novel.

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