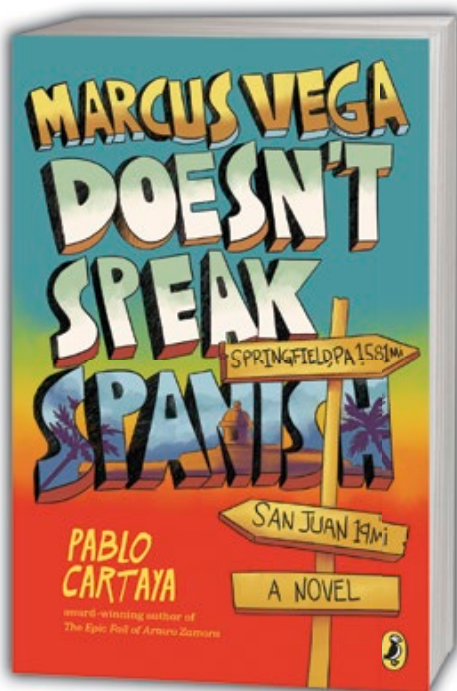


One boy's search for his father leads him to Puerto Rico in this moving middle-grade novel.



Marcus Vega is six feet tall, 180 pounds, and the owner of a premature mustache. When you look like this and you're only in the eighth grade, you're both a threat and a target.

After a fight at school leaves Marcus facing suspension, Marcus's mom decides it's time for a change of environment. She takes Marcus and his younger brother to Puerto Rico to spend a week with relatives they don't remember or have never met. But Marcus can't focus knowing that his father—who walked out of their lives ten years ago—is somewhere on the island.

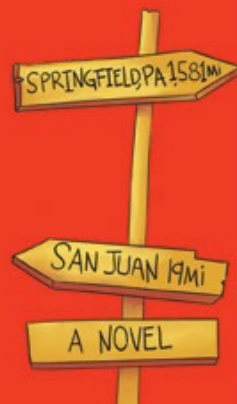
So begins Marcus's incredible journey, a series of misadventures that take him all over Puerto Rico in search of his namesake. Marcus doesn't know if he'll ever find his father, but what he ultimately discovers changes his life. And he even learns a bit of Spanish along the way.

★ **"Excellent."**

—SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL

★ **"An ideal read for boys or reluctant readers."**

—SCHOOL LIBRARY CONNECTION



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When we are introduced to Marcus, he's described as "the Mastodon of Montgomery Middle, the Springfield Skyscraper, the Moving Mountain, the Terrible Tower," but his actions and care for his brother contradict these images of him as a big monster. How would you describe Marcus instead?
2. Why does Principal Jenkins suggest Charlie attend another school?
3. Marcus's businesses help enforce school rules. Is it wrong that he's making money by doing this? Explain.
4. Do you think Danny's petition to keep Marcus in school was useful? Why did Danny start this petition?
5. Why does Marcus's mother eventually decide that the family should go to Puerto Rico?
6. The book is called *Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish*, and throughout the novel Marcus himself admits that he doesn't know the language. Is this true? Do you think Marcus doesn't know Spanish? Explain.
7. How do you feel about the fact that much of the Spanish dialogue isn't translated? Why might the author have chosen to not include an English translation or glossary?
8. Marcus gets angry a few times during this book—he punches Stephen, and later he also punches Sergio's truck. What could he do to better channel his emotions?
9. What does Charlie mean when he tells his father, "You broke the rules!" after he tries to explain his absence to Marcus?
10. Marcus observes that Puerto Rico changed his mom: "This post-Puerto Rico Mom is fierce. Who knew beautiful weather, old architecture, a gorgeous countryside, and exotic fruits and vegetables could do that to a person?" Do you think Puerto Rico changed Marcus and Charlie, too? If so, how?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

In the Author's Note at the end of the book, Pablo Cartaya explains that this book represents a Puerto Rico before it was devastated by hurricanes in 2017. Knowing that Puerto Rico's landscape was so changed by these events, do some research on Puerto Rico before and after the hurricanes, and write a compare and contrast report explaining the significant changes to the island after these events. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6)

Keeping in mind the travel guides Charlie gets in the airport for Puerto Rico, create your own travel guide for the island. Your guide should incorporate images, text, and other elements to encourage travelers to visit Puerto Rico. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.6)

About **PABLO CARTAYA**



Pablo Cartaya is an award-winning author, speaker, actor, and educator. In 2018, he received a Pura Belpré Author Honor for his middle grade novel, *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora*. His second novel, *Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish*, is available now. His third novel, *Each Tiny Spark*, publishes in 2019. Learn more about Pablo at pablocartaya.com and follow him on Twitter @phcartaya.

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