



## Estrella's Quinceanera

*Malin Alegria*

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For as long as Estrella Alvarez can remember, her mother has been planning to throw her an elaborate quinceañera for her fifteenth birthday -- complete with a mariachi band, cheesy decorations, and a hideous dress. Just thinking about her quince makes Estrella cringe. But her mother insists that it's tradition.

Estrella has other things on her mind, anyway -- like dating Speedy. Does it matter that her new friends -- and her parents -- would never approve of a guy from el barrio? Estrella's almost fifteen and wants to start making her own decisions. But is she ready to find out who she is -- and who she really wants to be?

## Estrella's Quinceanera Details

Date : Published May 22nd 2007 by Simon Schuster Books for Young Readers (first published March 21st 2006)  
ISBN : 9780689878107  
Author : Malin Alegria  
Format : Paperback 288 pages  
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# From Reader Review Estrella's Quinceañera for online ebook

## Katrina says

Estrella's Quinceañera was recommended to me last year by a local middle school principal who had heard about the book and its positive reviews on NPR. It sounded like a perfect book for our Vamos a Leer book group, so we put it on our reading list for this year. The book was a quick and enjoyable read, and while I was processing my own thoughts about it, I decided to check out what other readers had said about the novel. While many of the reviews and comments were quite positive, I was shocked at the intensity of some of the more critical or negative ones. Many of these accused the book of being overly simplistic with flat characters, or wrote that the ending was just too good to be true. There was something about these comments that troubled me, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. I found myself going back to comments from teachers who said their students couldn't get enough, and that in fact, many girls read the book over and over. Many young adults had nothing but praise for the book. Where does this leave us as educators when we have such disagreement in the responses and reviews to the book?

I was reminded of a quote I'd recently read in Anna Quindlen's *What I Learned from Reading*—“. . .in circles devoted to literary criticism, among the professors of literature, the editors and authors of fiction, there was sometimes a kind of horrible exclusivity surrounding discussions of reading. There was good reading, and there was bad reading. There was the worthy, and the trivial. This was always couched in terms of taste, but it tasted, smelled, and felt unmistakably like snobbery” (p. 11). I have to wonder if this snobbery is at work here. While Estrella's Quinceañera didn't move me the way some of the other books we've read this year have, that doesn't mean it isn't worth reading. Teenagers love this book. It resonates with them, and I can see why. Among all of the discussions today about how hard it is to get young adults to read, why wouldn't we promote a book that has been so well received by the very teenagers we're trying to encourage to read? I feel like the things that Estrella struggles with are authentic. Having won a scholarship to a prestigious private high school, Estrella finds herself in a place quite different from the neighborhood she grew up in. She struggles to decide who she really is, who she wants to be, and what her identity as a Mexican-American teenager means to her. It's a book that is relevant to teenagers today—Estrella argues with her parents, loses friends, has guy troubles, and has to figure out the kind of person she wants to be through the decisions she makes on how to live her life.

As the NPR article points out, it is the quintessential coming of age story, but what sets it apart is that it's written from the point of view of a Mexican-American protagonist, which sets it apart from the majority of other similarly themed novels. I loved how each chapter began with a Spanish/Spanglish word in defined in Estrella's own words. Not only does it provide vocabulary or cultural references that will be familiar to many Spanish speaking youth, it will also expose those unfamiliar with the language or culture to new knowledge. It also provides a context that encourages students to predict what might happen in the chapter. For those who criticize the book for its too good to be true ending, arguing that life never works out that perfectly I'll defer to a quote from Edward Albee that I read in Quindlen's book: “Read the greatest stuff but read the stuff that isn't so great, too. Great stuff is very discouraging. If you read only Beckett and Chekhov, you'll go away and only deliver telegrams at Western Union” (*How Reading Changed My Life*, pg. 51). I couldn't agree more. Estrella's Quinceañera is a feel good ending—and sometimes that's exactly what we want and our students need.

Besides—who wouldn't love an author who wears a bright orange quinceañera dress to meet students and talk about her book?!

Other reviews:

Papertigers writes: "Alegría's book deals with the age-old theme of real friends accepting you for who you are: but adds a modern Latin twist to the story. Girls will love the pop culture references; all the drama via cell phone rings true. In the end, the birthday party Estrella puts together on her own has a little something for everyone... just like Estrella's Quinceañera."

We have a free educator's guide for the book available on our blog at: <http://teachinglatinamericathroughlit...>

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## **Living la Vida Latina says**

Reviewed by Sandra Lopez, Author of "Esperanza" and "Beyond the Gardens"  
Member of Living la vida Latina

Review: What do most of us do when the topic of quinceañeras come up? We sigh, we roll our eyes, we cringe so hard that we shrivel up inside like a burnt out match. The feeling's mutual in just about everyone. That was exactly how Estrella Alvarez felt in this story.

Even though I have never had a quince myself (thank god,) this story gave me warm nostalgia as I recalled my own years of growing up in a barrio. I remembered the "cholo losers" and the busy-body neighbors; the buttinski mother and the crazy relatives, everything. You can't help but empathize with Estrella when it comes to how her family views her as the last gleaming hope for a good education, or how she feels like an alien in the world of her rich, prep-school friends. Don't we all feel that way at some point?

I loved Estrella's surly and sarcastic tone as she described every grueling (and often, embarrassing) detail of the party planning. I also liked how Speedy wasn't your typical "cholo" but actually a nice guy (so few of them left in the barrio.) I did think Estrella needed to relax and slow down on growing up. She should've enjoyed hanging out with Speedy as a friend/person instead of concentrating so hard on getting her first kiss from him.

One unique thing about this book was that each chapter had a definition of barrio slang that you couldn't help but smile at. This was a relatable story of finding one's self while coming of age in a dark, scary world. Great job, Malin!

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## **Licha says**

This was a 3 star book for me. I would have loved to give this a higher score but there were some flaws I couldn't overlook.

First, the book is full of clichés. Poor girl on a scholarship starts a new school, gets new rich friends, and dumps her old friends. Girl is ashamed of her family, her culture, and her lifestyle. Girl likes poor boy but is sought by the rich, bad boy. Girl will learn many life lessons by the end of the book.

Second, and what probably bothered me the most about the book, was the stereotype after stereotype of Hispanics on practically every page. While some stereotypes may have been included to portray the culture, some were of the roll-your-eyes-and-cringe variety. I would hope that any type of reader would pick up this

book and not get a caricature portrayal of what it is to Mexican. I don't think the author did this maliciously, but I think it bordered on excessive use of stereotypes.

I did continue reading and at some point decided to just enjoy the story for what it was. I wanted to know what happened to Estrella and Speedy (the poor boy, who might be a thug with a heart of gold)? Did she make up with her old friends? Would the quinceanera take place? It was a bit like watching a romantic comedy. Seen one, seen them all but you still love watching them.

I think young girls will really love this book. I know I would have. And even though I never had a quinceanera, there's still that excitement that surrounds one.

The author uses a lot of Spanish words (loved that) but she includes a dictionary in the back. She also starts out each chapter with a Spanish word and the general definition of that word, but also her own translation of it. These I really enjoyed. Would definitely read this author again.

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## **Vamos a Leer says**

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## **Margarita Cruz says**

\*\*\*Spoiler Alert\*\*\* A quinceanera is a Mexican tradition which is a big party for a fifteen-year-old. According to hispanics, when a girl is fifteen she is no longer a girl, she now became a women. In this novel, Estrella Alvarez will become fifteen. Estrella is star for spanish. Estrella does not want a quinceanera. Problem is her mom feels like it is needed for her to have one. This novel is realistic fiction and is full of many interesting twists!

In this novel you will meet Estrella, her family, and friends. So, Estrella's fifteenth birthday is coming up. Her mom and her family start planning her quinceanera. Estrella insists she does not want or need one. Still, her mom disagrees. Estrella also has to deal with friends and her love life. She struggles to hide the fact that she lives in a barrio from her two best friends. Then, there's Speedy. Speedy is a cholo (a teenage boy who is member of a gang) from Estrella's barrio that Estrella has known for as long as she remembers. When they were kids, Estrella hated him. They hadn't seen each other in a really long time. Until one day, Estrella sees him and remembers she knows him. They start talking and she realizes he matured and is hotter than ever. So, back to her quinceanera. Her mom insists she needs a quinceanera. Estrella tries to please her mom so she agrees to have a quinceanera to make her mom happy. Things don't go as expected though. Her family starts going broke and Estrella, well Estrella just hits a breaking point where she doesn't want anything. She doesn't want a quinceanera anymore. She just doesn't want anything. So they cancel all of the plans done so far. Oh and her friends. Her two rich, bestfriends. Estrella has an argument with them because they don't agree to something. At end, Estrella ends up planning a quinceanera on her own with the help of some of her cousins. She does this because she knows that was her mom's dream, for her to have a quinceanera. At her quinceanera, At her quinceanera Speedy is her chambelan (the couple of the quinceanera). There they dance until the night fades away.

I believe the theme to this story is self reliance. In this novel, Estrella has to learn how to do things when no

one is there to help. She relies on herself to do almost everything. Just like the quinceanera at the end. She had to seek her way into planning it with no or very little help of anyone. There were other situations where she had to count on herself to get through things. I admire Estrella, the main character, because of how she got through things.

My favorite part of this novel were probably the last few chapters. In these, I found Estrella struggling with many things. Luckily she was able to get through them, which is why I admire her. This book partially reminds me of my life and the struggles I've had to overcome. It also reminds me to keep going no matter how hard life can be.

After reading this novel, I can say this was a great book. I highly recommend it to people finding themselves stuck in situations like these or any other situation. I feel like this book gives readers a bit of a reminder to keep on going no matter how hard the road can be. It certainly is one of my favorite books. I rate it a 5 out of 5.

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### **Arianna Albarillo-rodriguez says**

In Estrella's Quinceanera by Malin Alegrias, Estrella Alvarez is turning fifteen, and in Latino heritage, it's traditional to have a Quinceanera to celebrate a girl becoming a woman. She is definitely not happy about, because for as long as she could remember her mom has been planning a big celebration for Estrella. Now, she has to decide between her family's dreams and her sophisticated friends.

The theme of this book is basically figuring out who you want to be in life. Throughout the story Estrella is forced to make both tough and smart decisions, such as helping her mother plan her party or sneaking out to see a boy by the name of Speedy. Unfortunately most of the time Estrella would make the wrong decision and end up getting in trouble, either with her parents, friends, or her love interest. One thing I noticed through the story, is that whenever there is italicization, there is either a word in Spanish, or Estrella's thinking. An example of this is when they mention Tia (aunt) Lucky, or say quince (abbreviated form of quinceanera), it's always underlined. An example of using italicization when Estrella is thinking is her thinking to herself, "*Maybe I'm pushing my luck*, I thought." This book really related to me, because one day I might have a quinceanera and have to make some tough decisions that could decide what I become in life. In my family having a quinceanera is a big thing, so there would be a lot of pressure to have everything perfect. What if I had to decide between making my own decision and disappointing my family, because my decision ended up being a poor one? Would I want my party to be small with just family, or would I want it to be a huge extravaganza with everybody I've ever talked to? I would highly recommend this book for anybody who wants to learn some Spanish and read a good book!

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### **Anna says**

Estrella Alvarez finally acknowledges in the middle of this book that she has become a

vendida (ven-'dee'dah) n., Spanish, informal: 1) English translation is sellout 2. most commonly used as a label for Mexican-Americans or any Latino/ born in the U.S. who thinks and acts white, someone who is embarrassed of their Mexican/Latino culture and Spanish language 3. a coconut: brown on the outside and white on the inside.

Estrella or Star as she is known at the private school where she is a scholarship student is torn between the Mexican traditions of her parents and what her more affluent Anglo friends, Sheila and Christie, will think of some of those customs like the 15th birthday party or Quinceañera that her parents want to throw and that Estrella thinks will be absolutely tacky. Estrella's life is further complicated by her former best friends, Tere and Izzy, who think that she is now fresa or stuck-up, and the guy from el barrio named Speedy, whom Estrella has a crush on but who is also someone she knows her prep school friends and her parents would not approve of. By the end of the novel, Estrella figures out how to be both the best friend of her prep school friends and homegirl of her barrio friends. Likewise she also comes to appreciate her close-knit family.

This book is very accessible to teens of all cultures as well as satisfyingly resolved, and Bay Area teens may especially enjoy seeing the streets of various San Jose neighborhoods described. At the back of the book is "Spanglish 101" or "Glossary of Spanish-to-English terms in order of appearance" in the novel, but non-Mexican readers can figure out the Hispanic slang from the informal dictionary definitions that open and set the theme for each chapter.

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### **Nicole G. says**

1. Culture or group portrayed: Latino-Americans
2. Book information: Alegría, M. (2006). *Estrella's Quinceañera*. New York: Simon and Schuster Books for Young Adults.
3. Summary: Estrella Alvarez is turning 15, and her female relatives are driving her crazy, planning her a quinceañera (a traditional coming-of-age party) that she doesn't even want. Estrella is caught between her barrio in San José and the world of the Sacred Heart Academy, where everyone is white and wealthy. To complicate matters, she's falling for a boy from her neighborhood, but her father thinks he's a cholo (thug) and won't let her date. Will Estrella ever figure out who she is?
4. Cultural/Multicultural evaluation: This has the elements of a typical teen problem novel – fitting in, parents just don't understand, guy troubles – with the further complications of cultural and generational divide. Estrella's parents have pinned all of their hopes on her, by dint of her scholarship (her father is very fierce about her education and doesn't want her to date and possibly lose everything) and her age (her mother and aunt were never able to afford quinces of their own, so they want Estrella to have the very best); Estrella chafes under their decision-making, as they never ask her what SHE really wants. At Sacred Heart, the private school she attends, her closest girl friends are white and well-off; Estrella is embarrassed to have her mother pick her up in her broken-down minivan. Classmates have made comments about her being the "maid's daughter." Estrella bends and twists herself to fit into their narrow worldview, even letting herself be called "Star" because it's too hard for her classmates to pronounce her real name. This sort of identity crisis, in different ways, is familiar to many teenagers. Estrella likes to use Spanish words interspersed with her English, and there are definitions in her own words as headings for each chapter, as well as a glossary in the back of the book.
5. Conclusion/verdict: Recommended for upper middle to high school.

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### **Alondra says**

This book was about a girl that didnt want a quincaniera, but her mom made her have one. She lost two of her friends because she went to another school with rich people. It made me feel like i want a quincaniera. To keep the tradition going. I learned to never be a person that wants to change your friends image and characteristics just to have a boyfriend. I would recommend this book to everyone because it is a good story that can actually happen.

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### **Toniruthless2014 says**

The book that i am reading is called Estrella's Quinceanera. This book is about a girl named Estrella and she is turning 15. Estrella is not at all happy about turning 15 and as long as she can remember her mother had always been planning her daughter's Quinceanera. The things her mother is planning she doesn't like at all. She hates her dress and the decorations her mother is planning to have and she just isn't fond of this whole situation. All she wants is to have a regular party at a restaurant so she can invite her two best friends from private school. Estrella doesn't want her friends to know she lives in the barrio and tries to hide her home secrets until she falls for a boy named Speedy, a cholo that neither her friends nor parents would approve of. Caught between her family's wishes and the charm of her sophisticated friends, Estrella is forced to make some tough choices. This funny, touching book follows one girl's struggle to figure out who she really wants to be. To me the reason i would say the author may have wrote this book is because they have had an experience with this and wanted others to read about it too. This author to me did achieve her goal for the simple fact she did tell and get through her story and made her point. Yes the words are effective and powerful. I liked that she wrote in a way that i could understand everything that was going on in the book and it really grabbed me. In the book to me the characters are believable because they do things and feel like people in the real world do. Strengths that the book has is the way things are written for you to understand and they had definitions and meanings for words you didn't know. This book had no weakness to me i felt that it was very good and kept me engaged. This book is a fiction and the qualifications for her writing this is because she is also because she is Hispanic. Yes i do agree with the arguments in this book because some things parents want not all kids want the same thing. My overall response to this book was that i really liked it and it kept me wanting to read more and more. I would recommend this book to other because it's really good but also it could relate to someone.

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### **Mariah Bohannon says**

Estrella's Quinceanera is a book about a girl whose mother is making her have a quinceanera that she doesn't want. A quinceanera is a traditional party Hispanics give a female in their family when becoming of the age of 15. Quinceanera means sweet 15 in Spanish. It is a party as big as a wedding but only for one person. The reason they celebrate quinceaneras is because in the Latin cultures it is believed that when a female turns 15 she is now a woman and along with becoming a woman, come a lot of extra privileges and responsibilities. The reason Estrella doesn't want to have a sweet 15 is because she is embarrassed about her culture and thinks that if she were to have a quinceanera her friends at the private school would think of her differently. She thinks they would think of her differently because they are all from the more higher class part of town and over there they don't celebrate quinceaneras because most all of the Latinos live in the other part of town. My favorite character in this book would probably be Speedy because he is the one that actually convinced Estrella into having a quinceanera and not being ashamed of who she was, where she lived, and her ethnicity.

and culture. Although, my least favorite character was Estrella because I didn't really like how her attitude and negativity. "I think the author wrote this book for entertainment, to teach about Hispanic culture, and to teach the reader about not being ashamed of where you come up from. The reason I liked this book and why it kept me reading is because I understood every single thing that was going on in the book. Not because I was ever ashamed of my culture, but because I'm 14 about to have a quinceanera, I was involved in my sister's quinceanera, I know a lot about where she was coming up from, and I know a lot about my culture and could relate to the book. Yes, the ending of the book was very predictable, but in the beginning, what I thought was going to happen didn't happen. If this book was made into a movie the actress I would choose to play Estrella from the book would be Jenifer Lopez. Because she is a good actress, plays good roles in a lot of other Latino movies, such as "Mi Familia", and I think she would know a lot about quinceaneras since its coming from her culture as well. Estrellas Quinceanera was a very good book! I would really recommend the book to anyone who enjoys reading books about culture, learning, love, parties, or comedy.

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### **Andrea Tuan says**

I will say, the same as Abbie, that it seriously was terrible in the beginning but the ending I guess was sweet, but quite obvious it was going to happen. Agapito (Speedy) was pretty amazing if I say so myself. I do have to say that it was also quite obvious they were going to be together, but at least there was no love triangle. Tere and Izzy just amused me... a lot. Christine and Sheila... they were so sweet, then bad... then so sweet again haha. Kevin-Jerk... Her Nana and Tia were also hilarious. Marto is amazing too! XD Not very good at reviews am I?

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### **Debbie says**

A fairly light, bubbly read about a girl from the barrio struggling with who she wants to be in the world and being pulled in two very different directions. As she tries to be a good girl and please everyone around her, she makes herself miserable.

Should she go along with her mother's plan for a tacky, over-the-top quinceañera or be the posh party girl that her new friends at the private school she attends on scholarship want her to be?

Maybe it's predictable, but there are positive messages about the importance of family, community, and being true to yourself. And the Spanish words are integrated nicely, just the right amount of spice.

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### **Malin says**

Well, I admit I am biased. I wrote the book. And I love it. There aren't many Chicano authors who celebrate contemporary barrio culture like I do. Si Señor!

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### **Rocio says**

"Never forget where you came from it might save you from where you can end up", unknown quote. I really

enjoyed the book Estrella's Quinceañera by Malin Alegria. There was a lot of drama going on with Estrella the main character caused by her friends and family. The situation only got worse when Estrella's mom was going overboard with the quince that Estrella never wanted. Alegria nailed the feelings a 14-15yr old girl would feel concerning her quince, parents/family's behavior and all the stress from her friends/boys. Apart from that I feel that Alegria did a fantastic job on portraying certain values that one shouldn't forget. She showed many believes mexican-american teenagers start to have and how sadly they start to forget about their roots. Throughout the plot the life lessons couldn't be any more precise,true, and many people should take them in account.

The first reason why I liked this book was because of the drama and problems. I would always get intrigued by wanting to find out how the problem would get resolved. I would make predictions and wonder if i was right which kept me wanting to read more and more. Like during the end I wanted to know if Estrellas white friends would go to her quince or if only her barrio friends would accompany her. Also the kind of drama that occurs is very relevant to a teen's life so you get where they're coming from. For example that feeling of frustration you get when you feel like your parents are controlling your life. It's just easy to understand the book because you can relate to it a lot.

The second reason why I really liked it was because of all the values it teaches you. I think it really touches you more if you come from the bottom. For example Estrella comes from el barrio and with work/effort she works herself into a prestigious private high school. The problem is that she starts looking above and seeking high expectations and feels superior when she's en el barrio because she goes to a high-class school. She starts to forget about her roots. Gets more and more ambitious and starts having a different point of view on her style of living to the point where she is embarrassed from where she comes from and mistreats her life style. She doesn't realize how hurtful and cruel she is being to the people she grew up with and that see el barrio as of something to be proud of. Throughout the book there's these life lessons where it makes you rationalize on a lot of things and shows you not to take for granted a lot of stuff but to be happy with what you have and how much work it took you to get there.

With that said I really recommend this book. I think it's a fast read and very enjoyable. The book is easy to follow and relatable if you are a teen or if you're having a quince you get see how overwhelming it can be. You also get to see Estrellas culture clashes influenced by her american friends. It also gives you some insight on the mexican culture and you get to see the struggles they face and how good spirited they are. Overall it's a good book and there is a little bit of everything involved love, fights, tears etc. You won't want to put it down and before you know it it will be over.

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