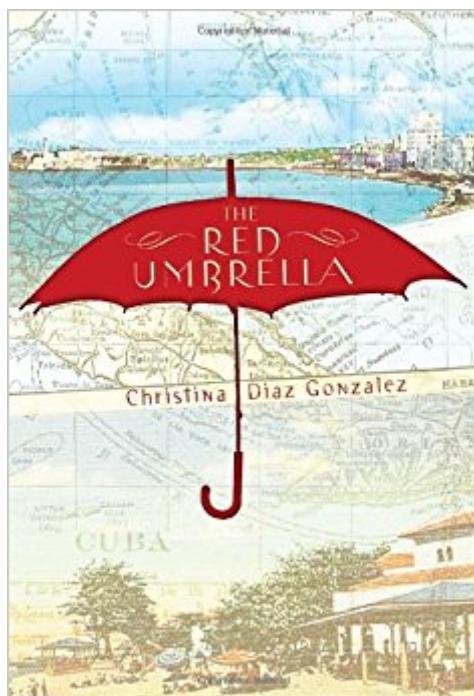


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# The Red Umbrella



## Synopsis

The Red Umbrella is a moving tale of a 14-year-old girl's journey from Cuba to America as part of Operation Pedro Pan— an organized exodus of more than 14,000 unaccompanied children, whose parents sent them away to escape Fidel Castro's revolution. In 1961, two years after the Communist revolution, Lucía Alvarez still leads a carefree life, dreaming of parties and her first crush. But when the soldiers come to her sleepy Cuban town, everything begins to change. Freedoms are stripped away. Neighbors disappear. And soon, Lucía's parents make the heart-wrenching decision to send her and her little brother to the United States—on their own. Suddenly plunked down in Nebraska with well-meaning strangers, Lucía struggles to adapt to a new country, a new language, a new way of life. But what of her old life? Will she ever see her home or her parents again? And if she does, will she still be the same girl? The Red Umbrella is a touching story of country, culture, family, and the true meaning of home.

“Captures the fervor, uncertainty and fear of the times. . . . Compelling.”

The Washington Post

“Gonzalez deals effectively with separation, culture shock, homesickness, uncertainty and identity as she captures what is also a grand adventure.”

San Francisco Chronicle

From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 0590 (What's this?)

Paperback: 304 pages

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Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 7.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 125 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #23,948 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #28 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > Hispanic & Latino #45 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1900s #973 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Family Life

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Grade 6-9 •Fourteen-year-old Lucía lives an easy middle-class life in 1961 Cuba, thinking only about clothes, boys, and dances. When Communist revolutionaries occupy her town, an escalating witch hunt against capitalists compels her parents to send her and her brother to the U.S. under the care of the Catholic Welfare Bureau (as part of "Operation Pedro Pan," which the endnotes explain was the largest-ever exodus of unaccompanied children in the West). Lucía eventually settles with a foster family in Nebraska, where she comes to terms with her dual identity as a Cuban exile and an American teen. She must also piece together a picture of what's happening to her parents and friends at home from interrupted phone calls, censored letters, and newspaper articles. This well-written novel has a thoroughly believable protagonist and well-chosen period details. It should be noted, however, that Gonzalez portrays the single sympathetic Communist character as increasingly brainwashed. Few readers will recognize the polemics driving this convincing story, but as an introduction to the history and politics of the Cuban-exile community, it could generate some excellent classroom discussions. •Rhona Campbell, Washington, DC Public Library (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

When Castro comes to power, teenage Lucía wants nothing to do with the revolution; she is more worried about what to wear to the school dance. Then she witnesses the horrifying public hanging of her father's boss, and her parents send her and her little brother, Frank, to safety in the U.S., where a church places them with a kind foster home in Nebraska. Based on the author's parents' story, Gonzalez's first novel captures the heart-wrenching, personal drama of family separation. At the start of each chapter, a brief newspaper headline gives a glimpse into Cuban politics and history, but the core of Lucía's first-person narrative is her emotional upheaval as she cares for Frank and tries to fit into her eighth-grade class, where everything is strange and different. The characters, including the loving, imperfect adults, are authentic, and teens will recognize Lucía's rebellious moments, which sometimes get ugly, as well as her anguish over costly long-distance calls home and her hope for reunion with her family. Grades 6-10. --Hazel Rochman --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

This book is amazing! I did not want it to end. I loved how every chapter had a title from a

newspaper. I feel like I learned so much about Castro's Revolution and this time period. This book gave perspective to what it would have been like to live in Cuba during this time (and now to be honest). It is easy to judge others when we do not understand their circumstance. I'm very happy that Gonzalez chose to research and utilize her family's experience to write this book. It is both a beautiful and sad story. I feel like I am better off for reading it.

Since I left Cuba at about the time the main character of the book did, and I had similar experiences, I really enjoyed remembering situations in my past that I had not thought about in decades. The book was easy to read and the story of the author's family was presented in a fictional, novel-like style using the historical facts and the experiences lived by the real people who inspired the author to write. The title was perfect.

As the child of Cuban Exiles I can honestly say this book has truly touched me. I cried in so many scenes. The descriptions and emotions sounded so much like the stories I've heard from my parents and grandparents. The hardest to read was Lucia's good bye at the airport. As a parent I can only imagine what that reality felt like. Gonzalez's use of imagery and words were perfect. Her comparison to Cuba vs Miami's vibe couldn't have been more accurate. I am an American born Cuban. You see, my mom and my dad fled Cuba but have taught me all about my heritage. I look forward to one day visiting a Cuba free from communism. Until then...

Christina Gonzalez has created a fictionalized story inspired by the experience of her parents who as children came to this country from Cuba between 1960-62. The number of unaccompanied Cuban children who arrived on these shores during that time grew to 14,000. They joined a program that became known as "Pedro Pan," sponsored by the Catholic Welfare, and were sent to private homes or orphanages while waiting to be reunited with their loved ones. While this separation was intended to be a short one, in reality it extended over many years and some of these children never saw their parents again. Christina's book is marketed as a novel for Young Adults, but the crisp writing and the universal feeling of loss and longing for home will appeal to readers of all ages. The story revolves around a 14 year old girl, Lucia, who dreams of celebrating her "quinces" in her native Cuba, and her 7-yr-old brother. After a short time in Miami at a camp for Cuban children they are sent to live in a farm up north where they experience snow for the first time. Although their new family shows them kindness and tries to make their adjustment to this country a pleasant experience, Lucia and her brother want nothing more than to be reunited with their parents. The title

of the book comes from a red umbrella Lucia's mother owns, an umbrella Lucia hates but whose color the mother defends. It's not until the end of the book that we understand the true symbolism of the umbrella. Red stands for strength, courage. For me it stood for genius. Christina has personalized the story of two Pedro Pans--this reviewer was one of them--with dignity and heart! Brava, Christina!

Finally a real sense of what my parents endured as children and their parents endured at the hands of this coward who hides his own madness and hatred behind a leadership that is anything but AfÃ¢ I have always felt respect and admiration for my parents but this book has taken those sentiments to a whole new level. I am so thankful that the author decided to put this into writing and to share it with the world. I am so thankful that my parents insisted that I read this, my only regret is having taken this long to get around to doing so. It was only because a teacher at my children's school insisted on making it a mandatory reading for her grade level this year that I was reminded to read this touching book. I've never felt more proud of my heritage and more in awe of my family's bravery!

This was great!!! It was a wonderful look at the early days of Castro's revolution and Cuban and American relations in 1961. The story is told from a 14 year old girl's point of view, Lucia. Lucia has normal 14 year old growing pains. She likes boys, wants to wear make up, is irritated by her younger brother, Frankie, but instead of having a normal teenager's life, Cuba, her country and home, goes into turmoil. When Castro and his revolutionary followers take over the government, not only is there soldiers everywhere, but also people being branded as traitors to the revolution. Unfortunately, because her parents believe it's ok to have a different opinion from Castro, Lucia's family is branded as traitors. To save her, Lucia's parents send both her and her brother to the United States. Lucia and Frankie go to live with a foster family in Nebraska until her parents can join them or the revolution ends. Lucia must learn a new language, eat new foods, and make new friends. She adjusts rather well, but all the time she worries about her mother and father back in Cuba and wonders if she will ever see them again because the revolution doesn't seem to be ending and American/Cuban relations are getting very tense...The first half of the book takes place in Cuba and offers an amazing look into life in Cuba during Castro's early days and the fear or fanaticism some people felt. The second half of the book is about Lucia adjusting to American life and presents an idea of what it was like to be a Latina immigrant in 1961. Superb. The ending brought tears to my eyes. I really connected to Lucia. This is a book I will read again.

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