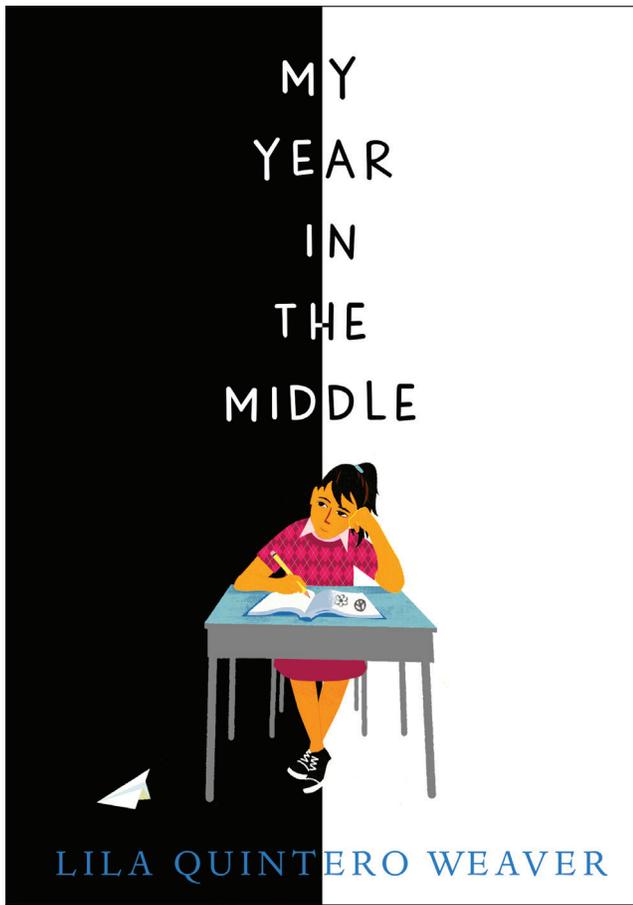


# MY YEAR IN THE MIDDLE

Lila Quintero Weaver



HC: 978-0-7636-9231-5 • Also available as an e-book and in audio

## Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used as writing prompts for independent work.

## About the Book

Lu Olivera doesn't want to take sides. An Argentinian immigrant, the sixth-grader doesn't want to be drawn into the racial disputes that are dividing her small Alabama town in the spring of 1970. She wants to concentrate on her friendships, her grades, and—now that she's discovered running—on her track times. But tensions are high at her school and throughout her community. A prominent politician is encouraging hateful prejudices. Some white parents are, too. And so are several of her classmates. Lu can't stay neutral forever, not if she wants to do what's right.

## About the Author

Lila Quintero Weaver, like her character Lu Olivera, was born in Argentina and grew up in Alabama in the 1960s. The author-artist of *Darkroom*, a graphic memoir, she lives in Alabama with her husband. This is her first novel.



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## Discussion Questions

1. “White kids sit on one side” of Lu’s sixth-grade classroom “and black kids on the other” (page 14). Why is the class arranged this way? Who sits in the middle row? Why?
2. Is Lu also in the middle outside of school? How does her foreign birth set her apart from her American-born classmates, both white and black? How does her growing up in America set her apart from her Argentinian-reared parents?
3. “Stay smooth,” Lu tells herself when she runs (page 6). “Move your feet quickly, but don’t go at top speed sooner than you have to.” Why is this good advice to follow off the track, too?
4. The author of *My Year in the Middle* is also an artist. Take a close look at the small illustrations that lead off each chapter. Which is your favorite? Why? How does the art enhance and extend the novel?
5. “People don’t like foreigners to meddle,” Mama says to Lu’s older sister, but Marina continues her political activity (page 50). Why does Mrs. Olivera think her children should stay out of controversies? Why does Marina disagree? Why does Lu eventually take her sister’s side of the argument?
6. What price has Sam’s father paid for his political activism? Does his son think it was worth it? Do you? Why?
7. At a Wallace political rally, “Confederate flags dance like the devil everywhere you look” (page 84). The Confederacy was defeated in 1865, more than a hundred years before this novel begins. Why were Confederate flags waving in 1970? Why are they still popular today?
8. Extra credit is offered to any student in Lu’s social studies class who writes a report on recent political activities in town, including the Wallace rally. “That’s discrimination!” one black student insists (page 113). What do you think? Do you agree with Charles or his teacher?
9. Mrs. Hartley is looking forward to George Wallace “putting everything back the way it used to be” (page 207). What aspects of the past do you think she misses? Would Belinda’s parents feel the same way? Why?
10. Black and white students in Lu’s town have only just begun to attend the same schools, yet in 1954, sixteen years before this novel takes place, the Supreme Court ruled against segregated schools. Why do you think it took so long for integration to come to Red Grove, Alabama? What is the purpose of the new East Lake Academy? Why are so many of Lu’s classmates eager to enroll?

11. “What’s the matter with you?” Lu asks Abigail when her friend shifts her political opinion (page 245). “Did Conrad brainwash you or something?” Why do you think Abigail now appears to support George Wallace? What role does peer pressure play in shaping political opinions? Should it? Why?
12. Discuss Lu’s feelings for Sam. How does her behavior around Sam contrast with Abigail’s behavior around Conrad?
13. “Politicking is against school regulations,” the track coach snaps when some of Lu’s teammates wear George Wallace buttons, but the girls ignore Mrs. Underwood’s comments (page 244). Should politicking be against school regulations? Why? What are the rules in your school?
14. Discuss Lu’s friends. Why do you think she was dumped by Phyllis? Why does Abigail turn against her? How is Belinda different from the other girls? Do you think she’ll be a better friend to Lu? Why?
15. Lu has a big stack of *Groovy Girl* magazines under her bed. When she looks at them with Belinda, what does she discover about the magazine? What does she realize about herself?
16. “I’m not so hot in the gumption department,” Lu admits (page 212). “Not so hot at all.” Is Lu selling herself short? What’s your definition of gumption? How does Lu demonstrate it throughout the book, not just in the final chapters?
17. *My Year in the Middle* is set in 1970. If it took place in our time, what details would the author have to change? What aspects of the story could she leave unchanged?

