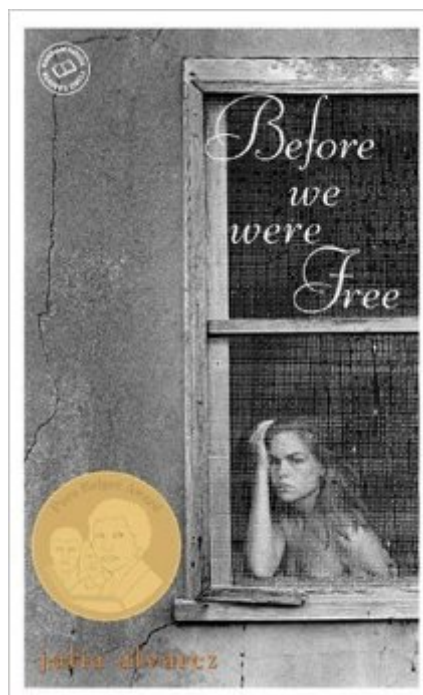


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# Before We Were Free (Laurel-Leaf Books Readers Circle)



## Synopsis

Anita de la Torre never questioned her freedom living in the Dominican Republic. But by her 12th birthday in 1960, most of her relatives have emigrated to the United States, her TÃ- o Toni has disappeared without a trace, and the governmentâ™s secret police terrorize her remaining family because of their suspected opposition of el Trujilloâ™s dictatorship. Using the strength and courage of her family, Anita must overcome her fears and fly to freedom, leaving all that she once knew behind. From renowned author Julia Alvarez comes an unforgettable story about adolescence, perseverance, and one girlâ™s struggle to be free.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 890L (What's this?)

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Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (85 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #39,701 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #3 inÂ Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Emigration & Immigration #25 inÂ Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > Military #45 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > Hispanic & Latino

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

The Dominican Republic occupies the eastern two thirds of an island in the heart of the Caribbean Ocean called Hispaniola. Christopher Columbus claimed this island for Spain in 1492, and it is here that he later returned, died and was buried. Over the years the Dominican Republic has struggled for freedom and independence. They fought for their independence from the nation of Haiti, which lies on the western one third of Hispaniola, and they suffered through the dictatorship of General Trujillo. This book takes place during the last years of the Trujillo dictatorship, in 1960 and '61. In this

book you will meet a colorful cast of characters from many different cultures and backgrounds. First there is Anita de la Torre, the 12-year-old narrator whose life changes dramatically over the course of a few months. You will meet her familia, her parents, siblings, cousins, uncles and aunts, who all live together on the family island compound. As the unusual and dangerous circumstances unfold in the story, many of Anita's relatives are forced to flee their tropical home for the colder climate of New York City. The dictator's men are everywhere. Those who oppose the dictator are often "disappeared" by the men in black, never to be heard from again. Then there are the mysterious phone calls about butterflies and tennis shoes. And just who is "Mr. Smith?" You will also meet Chucha, Anita's long-time nanny. She is one of the most interesting people in the story. Chucha is from Haiti, wears only purple clothing (even her underwear has to be dyed!), sleeps in a coffin, and has dreams where she can see the future. She also won't go into the Wimpy's Supermarket because the automatic doors have convinced her that the place is cursed and haunted. There is also blond-headed Sammy Washburn, the American consul's 12 year old son, whose family moves into a house at the de la Torre compound. Together, Sammy and Anita, explore the land of the compound - including the mysterious caves and the ancient cemetery. They encounter ghosts, and search for the treasure that was buried on the land many years ago. Anita may not understand all the political things that are happening in her life, but she certainly feels the fear that permeates her family's life. Parts of the story are told from the perspective of Anita's diary, which provides an even more personal approach to the apprehension she faces. Her favorite uncle, Tio Toni, is missing. Have the secret police in the dark sunglasses, who drive the black Volkswagens, taken him? Has he been "disappeared"? Who is it that she sees lurking around his casita at night? In spite of all the danger, Anita's parents make a decision to keep their family in the Dominican Republic and work for change. While Anita deals with all the frightening events that are unfolding in her life, she also struggles with growing up and her own personal endeavor for freedom. *Before We Were Free* is an exciting and fast moving book about growing up in a time of political intrigue and civil unrest. It is about decisions that must be made from the heart rather than the head and the courage that backs up such decisions. The fact that the author experienced much of what she writes in real life makes the story even more real and intriguing

This is one of the books I have liked the most. This book has many similarities with "Anne Franke's diary" both girls living in a cruel situation. Julia Alvarez did a terrific job creating an environment with a lot of tension. It was sad for me reading about a regimen I did not have known before and the lives that were gone in a country's attempt to obtain peace and freedom. I loved how the author portrayed

all the innocence in Anita's words so this book can be read for adolescents without describing the cruel and explicit violence lived in those times. I highly recommend this book not only to Dominicans or to adolescents, but for everyone from all ages. This book has touched me deeply.

As a 6th grade teacher, I like to keep on top of recent novels published for young adults. I read this and found it to be one of the best novels to be written recently for teens. I have also recommended it to many of my students who in turn have read it and have thoroughly enjoyed it as well. Full of suspense (what will become of Anita and her new love for Oscar? what will become of the family? what will happen to the country?), *Before We Were Free* keeps students' interest yet does not steer away from good writing. Beautiful writing, suspenseful action, and characters worth caring about make this a book every young adult should read.

Julia Alvarez - *Before we were Free*. This talented, prize winning author, again has accurately written a fascinating novel about actual political events in the Dominican Republic during the critical period when her parents, family and friends sought freedom from oppression and won. I am an Eye Witness. I was the the US Air Attaché at that time and was the tenant of their home when her parents had to flee to the United for safety. Manuel J. Chavez Lt. Col. USAF (Ret)

The Story, "Before we were Free," Includes several interesting events. First Sam Washburn moves in and Anita falls in love with him. Second she started not liking him because he didn't pay attention to her. Then she started going through puberty and was hard to manage situation with her family and love life. The things Anita was having trouble understanding is when the SIM barged in the house and Raded the house set cameras and everything. They were trying to find Tio Toni. That was hiding in his "Casita" he made. Anita had so many questions but her mom couldn't answer to her because she didn't want to get her worried. Later on, towards the end of the story Anitas dad went to jail with Tio Toni and there died for their freedom. There are so many interesting events that happened througho ut he story. I encourage you to read the story and read on more about those other events I did't inculude; those mistirious events!

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