

HOLIDAY HOUSE BOOK CLUB GUIDE



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This Is the Year

by **Gloria Muñoz**

★“Muñoz’s debut teaches us what it means to be a human on Earth and how we keep surviving—together.” —*Booklist* (starred review)

ABOUT THE BOOK

This dazzling YA cli-fi written in prose and verse will speak to any reader struggling with the state of our world and how to understand their place in it.

Seventeen-year-old self-proclaimed Goth and aspiring writer Julieta Villarreal is drowning. She’s grieving her twin sister who died in a hit-and-run, and her Florida home is crumbling under the weight of climate disaster.

Then, Juli is recruited by Cometa, a private space program enlisting high-aptitude New American teens for a high-stakes mission to establish humanity’s first extra-terrestrial settlement.

Juli begins her training, convinced Cometa is her path to freedom. But her senior year is full of surprises, including new friendships, roller-skating, and first love. And through her small but poignant acts of environmentalism, Juli begins to find hope in unexpected places.

Told in gripping prose interspersed with poems from Juli’s writing journal, this genre-bending novel explores themes of immigration, climate justice, grief, and the power of communities.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Juli is grieving the death of her twin sister, Ofe. The five stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Cite passages from the novel that reveal Juli’s journey through each of these stages. What helps her finally accept her sister’s death?
- Discuss Juli’s relationship with her mom. How does their relationship get worse after Ofe’s death? Juli talks to her sister throughout the novel. Explain what Juli means when she says, “You [Ofe] kept us from each other by eclipsing me” (p. 4). What does this reveal about Juli’s sense of self? At what point in the novel do Juli and her mom repair their relationship? What contributes to this change?

- Describe the friendship between Juli, Mari, Roger, and Sonia. Why does Juli tune them out at the beginning of senior year? How do they attempt to bring Juli back to the group? Explain the following quote: “Here we are, the old gang, skipping class. We know each other best of all, and yet we can’t reactivate or replicate what we lost” (p. 77). At what point does Juli realize that the “old gang” is grieving Ofe as well?
- Sonia reveals that she and Ofe had been in a romantic relationship. How does this surprise Juli? Debate whether she is hurt or angry that Ofe didn’t tell her. Explain why Sonia and Ofe felt the need to develop an exit plan. What was their plan? In what way is Sonia moving forward?
- Juli mentions loneliness throughout the novel. How is this loneliness a result of her sister’s death? What is Roger’s role in helping Juli confront feelings of loneliness? Trace Juli and Roger’s relationship from the beginning of the novel to the end. How does their romance change Juli? Ms. Hawthorne says, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” (p. 204). Contrast how Juli and Roger see beauty. Explain the beauty in their relationship.
- Describe Juli’s therapy sessions with Martha. Cite passages where Juli uses sarcasm when talking with Martha. Explain what Juli means when she says, “Sessions are free, but they are costing me my dignity” (p. 118). Debate whether Juli regains her dignity. What are other examples in the novel where Juli jokes to deal with uncomfortable situations?
- Juli is a talented writer. Explain what Ms. Hawthorne, her creative writing teacher, means when she says, “I want to encourage you to write the world” (p. 43). Explain why Juli is reluctant to share her writing. Jeanine, a new girl at Sunshore High School, invites Juli to go roller-skating. Discuss what Juli means by “Skating is a poem I never knew I needed” (p. 227). Cite other times in the novel when Juli sees things through a writer’s lens.
- Discuss the purpose of StarCrest. What are the benefits of the program? Why is this private space group targeting New Americans? What does Juli want to accomplish by enrolling in the program? Debate Mami and Roger’s idea that the program is racist. What do they see that Juli is unable to see? At what point does it appear that Principal Shears and Agent Morningstar are exploiting the New Americans in the program? What contributes to Juli’s decision to leave the program?
- Discuss the symbolism of Techno, the wounded bird. What is symbolic about the storm? How does aiding Techno and the storm victims give Juli the hope she needs to move forward with her life?
- Discuss the structure of the novel. Throughout the book Juli gives reasons for and against going into space. Explain how these reasons slowly unveil Juli’s growth as a character. What is the purpose of the poems from Juli’s journal that are interspersed throughout the novel? How do they advance the plot? Explain the title of the book.

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Gloria Muñoz is the author of *Your Biome Has Found You* and *Danzirly*, which won the Ambroggio Prize and a gold medal in poetry from the Florida Book Awards. She is an Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow, a Hedgebrook Fellow, a Macondista, a Highlights Foundation Diverse Verse Fellow, and a part of Las Musas. *This Is the Year* is her debut novel. Visit her online at GloriaMunoz.com and on Instagram @bygloriamunoz.