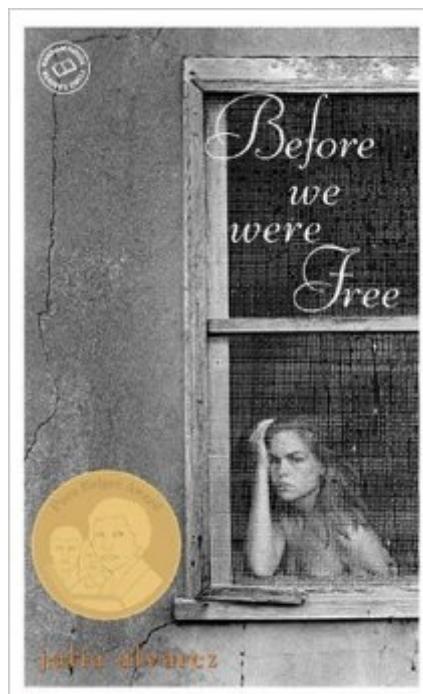


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# Before We Were Free (Laurel-Leaf Books Readers Circle)



## **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**

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## **Customer Reviews**

What would life be like for a teen living under a dictatorship? Afraid to go to school or to talk freely? Knowing that, at the least suspicion, the secret police could invade your house, even search and destroy your private treasures? Or worse, that your father or uncles or brothers could be suddenly taken away to be jailed or tortured or killed? Such experiences have been all too common in the many Latin American dictatorships of the last 50 years. Author Julia Alvarez (How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents) and her family escaped from the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic when

she was 10, but in *Before We Were Free* she imagines, through the stories of her cousins and friends, how it was for those who stayed behind. Twelve-year-old Anita de la Torre is too involved with her own life to be more than dimly aware of the growing menace all around her, until her last cousins and uncles and aunts have fled to America and a fleet of black Volkswagens comes up the drive, bringing the secret police to the family compound to search their houses. Gradually, through overheard conversations and the explanations of her older sister, Lucinda, she comes to understand that her father and uncles are involved in a plot to kill El Jefe, the dictator, and that they are all in deadly peril. Anita's story is universal in its implications--she even keeps an Anne Frank-like diary when she and her mother must hide in a friend's house--and a tribute to those brave souls who feel, like Anita's father, that "life without freedom is no life at all." (Ages 10 to 14) --Patty Campbell --This text refers to the School & Library Binding edition.

In her first YA novel, Alvarez (*How the GarcÃ¡a Girls Lost Their Accents*) proves as gifted at writing for adolescents as she is for adults. Here she brings her warmth, sensitivity and eye for detail to a volatile setting the Dominican Republic of her childhood, during the 1960-1961 attempt to overthrow Trujillo's dictatorship. The story opens as 12-year-old narrator Anita watches her cousins, the GarcÃ¡a girls, abruptly leave for the U.S. with their parents; Anita's own immediate family are now the only ones occupying the extended family's compound. Alvarez relays the terrors of the Trujillo regime in a muted but unmistakable tone; for a while, Anita's parents protect her (and, by extension, readers), both from the ruler's criminal and even murderous ways and also from knowledge of their involvement in the planned coup d'etat. The perspective remains securely Anita's, and Alvarez's pitch-perfect narration will immerse readers in Anita's world. Her crush on the American boy next door is at first as important as knowing that the maid is almost certainly working for the secret police and spying on them; later, as Anita understands the implications of the adult remarks she overhears, her voice becomes anxious and the tension mounts. When the revolution fails, Anita's father and uncle are immediately arrested, and she and her mother go underground, living in secret in their friends' bedroom closet a sequence the author renders with palpable suspense. Alvarez conveys the hopeful ending with as much passion as suffuses the tragedies that precede it. A stirring work of art. Ages 12-up. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the School & Library Binding edition.

Would you risk your family's safety for freedom? Anita's father was a part of the Underground and was trying to come up with a way to assassin the dictator of the Dominican Republic, Trujillo. The

theme of this story is to fight for your freedom, regardless the difficulties that come with that. Anita's family is all moving to the United States and she doesn't understand why. The SIM (secret police) came to the family compound and searched for evidence of the family's involvement with the Underground. The novel then branches out and stems in many different directions. Throughout the book you constantly wonder, will the family ever be free? Julia Alvarez puts this story together in chronological order and uses many different writing techniques. This book achieves its goal of showing how fighting for your freedom may come with tragedy and hardships, but in the end, being free is worth the fight. In the novel Mami states, "At first, your father didn't want to endanger his family. But sometimes life without freedom is no life at all." Freedom, for many people, is one of the most important things in life. The difficulties of Anita's family, with Trujillo and having her entire family moving to the United States really makes readers able to connect to the Dominicans of this time. This was a heartfelt and inspiring novel that I would recommend to all.

Arrived in a timely manner and was as described in product description.

I thought this book was relatively well written. I read it en route to and from work and it managed to keep me captivated and not bored. The writing style was fluid and easy to follow without insulting the intelligence of the reader. As a fan of historical non-fiction/fiction writing I thought this novel was too the point and did not leave room for inaccuracies. I did feel that the ending was a bit abrupt and could have been completed a bit more cohesively - but life is never about smooth endings, sometimes things just end.

ok

This story did a good job leading the reader about the struggles living in the Dominican Republic during that era in time. The story was told thru one of the daughters. I felt her anxieties and happiness from her descriptions. At times the story kept me reading chapter to chapter in anticipation of what would happen next. I felt Ms. Alvarez ended the story too soon. She should have described more of their lives in America and how they survived for a few years. I have no complaints about the product, I received it quickly onto my kindle, which I love even though it is old. The only problem I have with my kindle is not having a brighter back light, so I can read it in the dark if I wish, without a light connecting to it.-rose

This should really get 4.5 stars, but that is not one of the options. The horror of the Trujillo years in the Dominican Republic has engendered some wonderful writing -- demonstration again of the maxim that the best gift a writer can have is an awful childhood. Julia Alvarez writes beautifully, and I will look for more of her books (they are not all available on kindle where I live). The main character is an astute girl whose family opposes Trujillo and lives under threat of imprisonment, torture and death. Her close and loving family tries to shield her from fear and danger, but that is not possible. She and her mother are the key characters in the book: brave and believable women.

I enjoyed this novel- think Alvarez's interpretation of a 12 year old Dominican girl's voice during a dangerous dictatorship was spot on.

This is the first book by Julia Alvarez that I have read, but I will happily now read everything she has written or writes. I love the sense of humour and the whimsical (for lack of another word) writing style, in spite of very moving and/or important stories, that many Latin writers have, and Julia Alvarez did not disappoint. Her style reminds me of Isabel Allende, one of my all-time favorite authors (I have ALL of her books).

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