



## Reading Guide

### ***What If a Fish***

By Anika Fajardo

#### **About the book**

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Half-Colombian Eddie Aguado has never really felt Colombian. Especially after Papa died. And since Mama keeps her memories of Papa locked up where Eddie can't get to them, he only has Papa's third-place fishing tournament medal to remember him by. He'll have to figure out how to be more Colombian on his own.

As if by magic, the perfect opportunity arises. Eddie—who's never left Minnesota—is invited to spend the summer in Colombia with his older half-brother. But as his adventure unfolds, he feels more and more like a fish out of water.

Figuring out how to be a true colombiano might be more difficult than he thought.

#### **Discussion Questions**

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1. Little Eddie plans to enter (and win) the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Arne Hopkins Dock Fishing Tournament, even though he doesn't know how to fish. Why is he so determined? What characteristics does Little Eddie have that might help him with his goal?
2. Mama hardly ever talks about Papa or about Colombia. Why do you think she keeps these memories to herself? What secrets is Little Eddie keeping from her?
3. When Little Eddie tells Cameron that he's going to spend the summer in Colombia, she doesn't seem very happy. Why doesn't Cameron want Little Eddie to leave? Why do you think the fishing contest is important to Cameron?
4. Little Eddie remembers learning the word "discombobulate" in fifth grade. What does it mean? Why does he remember that word when he arrives in Colombia?

5. When Little Eddie arrives in Colombia, he is bombarded by Spanish. Why doesn't Eddie already know Spanish? Why does Little Eddie start yelling all the Spanish words he knows when he first meets the Parades children? Is he being disrespectful? Respectful?
6. When the hat floating in the water at the beach turns out to be a bucket of leeches, Big Eddie tells his brother that this is part of Colombia—anything can happen. Are there other scenes in the book when something surprising, unexpected, or magical happen?
7. What does Abuela call Little Eddie? What does he think of his new nickname? How does his name change during the book? How do you feel about nicknames? Do you have one?
8. Many sad things happen to Little Eddie and the people he loves. Can you find examples of sadness in the book? Is there one moment that is the turning point for the sadness? What does Little Eddie learn about how different people respond to sadness?
9. When Little Eddie finally gets to go fishing in Cartagena, he and his brother talk about stereotypes. What stereotypes does Little Eddie notice? Are there stereotypes that you noticed? Big Eddie tells him, "*Sometimes you can use people's wrong ideas about you to get them to do what you want.*" What does he mean by that? Have you ever had someone stereotype you? How did it feel? What did you do?
10. When Mama's car and Big Eddie go missing back in Minneapolis, Little Eddie and Mama worry about Big Eddie. What are they worried about? Did you think he stole the car? Were you surprised to find out what actually happened?
11. Little Eddie and Cameron don't win the fishing contest, but they do end up catching a big one. What does the huge fish mean to Little Eddie? To Big Eddie? To Cameron? Do you think it was realistic that they catch such an enormous fish?
12. Little Eddie struggles with his identity. He's half Colombian and half white; he's a half brother; he has only one parent; he doesn't speak Spanish. All of these things make him wonder what part of himself is the real part. Do you think the other characters in

the book (Big Eddie, Cameron, Mama) are struggling with who they are? How does this struggle change during the book?

## **Extension Activities**

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### **Family**

Little Eddie's family is complicated. His father is gone and he lives with his single mom. He has a half brother who is almost a decade older than him. The only grandparent he knows is Abuela—who isn't actually his real grandmother. Other characters in the book also have complicated or nontraditional family structures. Eddie's friends Liam and Cameron also struggle with their families since both moved to be with their new stepfamilies. Discuss what makes a family. Have students map their family trees—not just those people who are related to them but those that feel like family.

### **Research and Evaluating Sources**

Little Eddie loves his set of encyclopedias. Explore different types of research sources from print encyclopedias like Little Eddie's to online resources like e-resources or Wikipedia. Have students explore how these sources are similar or different. Discuss appropriate sources for research. For example, Little Eddie's old encyclopedia might be a good source for learning about fish, but it might not be a good resource for learning about the World Trade Center towers if it was published before 2001. Have students write a report using different types of encyclopedic works.

### **Writing**

Several other kids make appearances in *What If a Fish*: Cameron, Liam, Alyssa, and the Schmidt brothers. The reader only knows a little about these secondary characters. Have students choose a character and write a narrative about that character. They can imagine what their families, thoughts, and experiences are like. Students can also rewrite a scene from the point of view of one of the other characters. For example, what does the scene at the dock look like from Alyssa's point of view?

### **Magical Realism and Magic**

Magical realism is a literary tool in which magical things happen in otherwise realistic stories. In *What If a Fish*, a few examples of magical realism include the hat turning into a bucket of leeches, the fish stealing Eddie's medal, and the appearance of Abuela's ghost. Magical realism was popularized in Latin American literature starting in the 1940s. Authors who have used magical realism include Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, and Laura Esquivel.

Magical realism is different from stories about magic (like stories about wizards and spells) or fantasy (stories about fairies and elves). Magical realism is often used to make a point about something bigger; for example, many Latin American authors used it to protest post-Colonialism and oppressive governments. Have students think about how the magical elements in *What If a Fish* are different from magical elements in other books or movies. They can make a chart or graph that shows the differences. Have students learn more about authors using magical realism. A couple picture book biographies to get started: *My Name is Gabito: The Life of Gabriel García Márquez* by Monica Brown, *Isabel Allende: Recuerdos para un cuento/Memories for a Story* by Raquel Benatar

### **Science: Water**

Water plays a central role in this book. But the water in Minnesota—freshwater lakes—is quite different from that in Colombia—the Caribbean Sea. Use the text to discuss the ecosystems of lakes vs. oceans. How does the water cycle change depending upon the body of water? How does the type of water impact the food chain?