



# Read Aloud Guide

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**Title:** *Islandborn* by Junot Díaz, illustrated by Leo Espinosa

**Best for:** K - 5

**Summary:** This book is about Lola and her search to figure out where she's from. Every kid in her class comes from somewhere else, and when the teacher assigns the students a project to draw a picture of their original country, Lola sets off through her neighborhood to discover more about where she was born, "the Island." We quickly understand that the Island is the Dominican Republic, and we learn about Lola's island through the stories of her family and neighbors, as well as the illustrations throughout the book.

**Why we chose this book:** In this book, Junot Díaz validates and affirms the experiences of all immigrant children, especially Afro-Latinx and Afro-Caribbean children. Even though Lola cannot remember the country she was born, she is surrounded by family and a community who are eager to share it with her. We love that this book helps children approach complex ideas – being born in another country, immigration, ethnic differences, natural disasters, even political unrest – through the eyes of a child wanting to know answers.

**Notes:** Some of the people Lola interview refer to "the Monster" – this is dictator Rafael Trujillo, though he is never named in the book.

**Central themes:** Afro-Latinx/Afro-Caribbean ethnicity, immigrant experience, family/community, self-knowledge, ancestry

**Introducing the book:** You can begin by showing the cover, reading the title and author, and then saying something like this:

*"This book is about a young girl named Lola who wants to know more about the place where her family originally comes from called the Dominican Republic. Does anyone here know if their family is from a different country?"*

*"We are going to learn a lot about Lola and her neighborhood and community. What is something special about your neighborhood or community?"*

*"In this book, Lola is from an island called the Dominican Republic. Has anyone heard of the Dominican Republic?"*

**After Reading:** Debrief with students

*"At the beginning of the book, Lola is supposed to draw about the Island but she can't remember it because she left so long ago! How did she solve her problem?" (She asked family and neighbors.)*

*"What are some of the things Lola is able to draw once she talks to her family and neighbors?"*