

Classroom Guide for
GET SET! SWIM!
by Jeannine Atkins
illustrated by Hector Viveros Lee

Reading Level

Read-aloud Level: Grade 1 and up

Read-alone Level: Grade 2 and up

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.8/.5

Lexile™ Measure: 640

Themes: Sports; Competition/Teamwork; Self-confidence; Family Pride, Love, and Tradition

Synopsis

Jessenia, Mami, and Luis take the bus with Jessenia's swim team to Weston, a suburban school where Jessenia will compete in her first swim meet at a rival team's pool. Jessenia is excited, and a bit scared, too. Her team never seems to win meets away from home. In addition, her team lost to Weston the last time they competed, and the pool at Weston is bigger than what Jessenia is used to. During her first race, Jessenia loses her concentration and does not win first place, but she is fortified by her coach's encouragement and her mother's support. When it comes time for her last race, Jessenia finds the strength to push ahead and win. The story is juxtaposed against Mami's hopes for her children and her memories of her homeland, Puerto Rico, with its blue skies and wide expanse of ocean. After the meet, Mami gives Jessenia a pair of lizard earrings, just like the ones she wore as a girl in Puerto Rico. Bolstered by renewed confidence and pride in her heritage, Jessenia promises that her team will return and win another time.

Background

Puerto Rico, an island located about 1000 miles (1600 kilometers) southeast of Miami, Florida, is a commonwealth of the United States. Puerto Ricans possess all the rights of U.S. citizens except for the right to vote in presidential elections, and they can move to and from the U.S. mainland without any immigration restrictions. The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico receives assistance and protection from the

United States, but has its own government for local matters and a constitution modeled after the U.S. Constitution.

The original inhabitants of Puerto Rico were Taino Indians, who came from South America. Puerto Rico's Spanish heritage dates back to the arrival of Christopher Columbus on his second westward voyage in 1493. Today, Spanish is the main language spoken, although both Spanish and English are the official languages.

It is estimated that close to 4 million people currently live on the island of Puerto Rico. According to the 1990 Census, 2.7 million Puerto Ricans live in the United States, of which approximately half are second and third generation, having been born on the mainland. The largest group of Puerto Ricans in the United States lives in New York City.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

Ask students to look first at the front cover and then at the back cover of the book. Do the pictures show the same scene? How might these scenes be related? How might they be related to the title of the book? What does the title suggest about the book's contents?

Have students turn to the title page and identify the items pictured there. Ask students to write down what role they think each item will play in the story. Remind students to check their predictions after reading the book.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

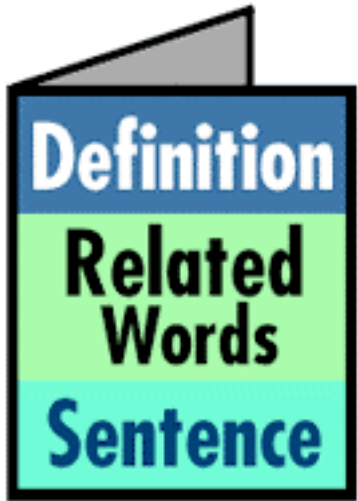
Invite students to examine the front and back covers of the book. Whom might this story be about? What does the title suggest? Who are the people on the back cover? What do all the seals and writing represent? Ask students to write down some questions they hope to have answered as they read the book. Suggest that students keep their questions in mind as they read.

Vocabulary

The following words have special meanings in the story or may be unfamiliar to some students.

swished	waggled	rammed
rival	muttered	triumphantly
stilts	surface	frothy
salsa	thundering	gulped

Assign a word to each student, using each word more than once, as necessary. Then have students make flip and flap books by folding a piece of paper lengthwise and cutting three horizontal flaps on the front side. Label the flaps Definition, Related Words, and Sentence. Under the appropriate flap, have students write the word meaning, related words such as synonyms, and an original sentence using the word. A sample illustration is shown below.

**AFTER READING ACTIVITIES****Discussion Questions**

After reading, discuss the story with students. You may wish to use some of the following questions to generate discussion.

1. How do you think Mami feels about Puerto Rico? Why?
2. Why was Jessenia scared about the swim meet? How would you feel in similar circumstances? Why?
3. How did the neighborhood where Weston school was located differ from where Jessenia and her family lived?
4. On the bus ride, how did Jessenia feel when her mother started speaking about Puerto Rico? Why did she feel this way?
5. What happened to Jessenia during her first race? How did her coach react? How did her mother react?
6. When it became clear that Jessenia's team would lose the meet, she started cheering louder and harder. Why did she do this?
7. As she swam her last race, Jessenia felt very connected to her mother. Why was it important for Jessenia to swim well for her mother?
8. Look again at the front and back covers of the book. How do these pictures relate to the story? What about the roles of the items shown on the title page? Were your original predictions correct? If not, how would you revise them?

9. Why did Mami give Jessenia lizard earrings after the meet? How did the earrings make Jessenia feel? Why?
10. What do you think Jessenia learned from participating in this swim meet? How did her feelings about her mother and her Puerto Rican heritage change?

Vocabulary

Ask students to share the flip and flap books they created prior to reading the story. Discuss the different definitions, related words, and sentences they wrote for each word. Students may also wish to decide which definition best fits each word as it is used in the book.

Reader's Response Journal

To promote active reading, you may wish to have students keep a reader's response journal. This journal will help students personalize what they are reading. Also encourage students to use as many of the vocabulary words as possible in their journal entries.

1. Coach Estes gave the girls this advice: "Just keep your eyes on where you're going." What did he mean by this? How might this advice help you in situations other than sports competitions?
2. What is your definition of a good sport? Does Jessenia meet that standard? Why or why not?
3. The lizard earrings had a special meaning for Jessenia. Have you ever been given something that had a special meaning? Why was it special?
4. Jessenia gained a greater understanding of her mother's dreams and her cultural heritage during the meet. Describe an experience that helped you better understand something about yourself or your family.

Other Writing Activities

Ask students to respond to one or more of the following writing activities.

1. Jessenia's mother grew up in Puerto Rico. Where is your family from? Interview a family member or do some research to find out more about this place. Then write a description of it, trying to use colorful words to create images that will help the reader visualize what you are describing.
2. Imagine you are a reporter for the student newspaper at Jessenia's school. Write an article about the swim meet for the paper.
3. Think about Jessenia's feelings when her team arrives at Weston. What might the children on the Weston team have done to make Jessenia's team feel more at home? Write a list of at least six suggestions.

ESL Teaching Strategies

The following activities may be used with students who speak English as a second language.

1. Encourage students who speak Spanish to read aloud the Spanish words in the text. Have them teach the rest of the class how to say these words. Then ask Spanish speakers to share other words or phrases that relate to the story. For example, students might teach the class how to say "swim meet" or "blue sky" in Spanish. Have students make a chart showing the Spanish and English for each word and phrase.
2. Read the story aloud, using normal speech but pronouncing words slowly and carefully. Have ESL students follow along in the book and point to characters, places, and objects in the illustrations. Help students make the connections between the pictures and the words.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

To integrate students' reading experiences with other subject areas, you may wish to have students complete some of the following activities.

Social Studies

1. Have students locate Puerto Rico on a map or a globe. Have students answer the following questions:
 - What kind of land form is Puerto Rico?
 - In what direction is Puerto Rico from the United States?
 - What bodies of water surround Puerto Rico?
 - Is Puerto Rico nearer or farther from the equator than the United States? How does its location affect Puerto Rico's climate?
 - What is the capital of Puerto Rico?
2. Suggest that students research the history of Puerto Rico to find a topic they would like to explore in more depth. Provide questions to guide students such as:
 - Who were the first people on the island?
 - When was the first European settlement established and by whom?
 - What events led up to Puerto Rico becoming a commonwealth of the United States?
 - The information on the Web site <http://Welcome.toPuertoRico.org> contains a broad range of basic information about Puerto Rico which can be used as a starting point for further research.
3. Have students research and then debate the issue of whether Puerto Rico should remain a commonwealth of the United States, become the 51st state, or become an independent nation.
4. Explain to students that Puerto Rico is a popular winter vacation destination for people from colder climates because of its warm climate, scenic sites, and sandy beaches. Have students search the Internet or visit local travel agencies to find

out more about Puerto Rico's tourist attractions. Then have students work in small groups to create travel brochures for the island.

Sports

Use this story as an opportunity to spark the interests of the sports fans in your class. Have these students work in small groups. One group might find out about and report on the rules and procedures for a swim meet. Other groups might interview swimmers; learn about the different strokes used in racing and the current records and record holders for these strokes; research the fitness and practice routines necessary for competitive swimming; and develop a list of water safety regulations all swimmers must follow.

Science

Interested students might learn more about the lizards found in Puerto Rico and other warm climates. Encourage students to prepare a summary of the basic characteristics of lizards and then create a fact file card for each specific lizard they identify. A sample card is shown below.

Lizard name: _____	Home: _____
Size: _____	Food: _____
Natural enemies: _____ _____	
Common defenses: _____ _____	
Other interesting facts: _____ _____	

Art

1. Have students analyze some of the interesting details in the illustrations. Direct students to the illustrations of outdoor scenes. At what time of year does the story take place? How do you know? How does the weather in these pictures compare to the weather in Mami's memories?
2. Next point out the illustration on the two-page spread that shows Jessenia at the edge of the pool for her first race. What did the artist show in the background? Why do you think he did that?
3. Challenge students to use animal motifs like Mami's lizard earrings as the basis for other designs. Students might create their own versions of earrings or other jewelry. Or they might create animal images for fabric, wallpaper, or wrapping paper designs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

Jeannine Atkins is a former English teacher who now writes full time. She was born in Montclair, New Jersey, and began writing books in second grade, during recess. She received her bachelors degree from the University of Massachusetts and her masters degree from the University of New Hampshire. "I write the way I read," says Atkins, "trying to find out what someone else's life is like." Atkins now lives in Whately, Massachusetts, with her husband, their daughter, and their pets.

Atkins won acclaim for her first picture book, *Aani And The Tree Huggers* (Lee & Low, 1995). This book, about a young girl in India who inspires the women of her village to save their beloved forest from developers, is based on the Chipko Andolan (Hug the Tree Movement) that took place in India in the 1970s, as well as on the author's own experience. Says Atkins, "I remember my shock as a girl when I went to a field where I often played and found stakes driven in the ground. The stakes marked where the land would be divided for houses. A place I loved was taken away. . . . I imagined Aani feeling even more horror as her people's trees were jeopardized." Atkins is also the author of *Mary Anning and the Sea Dragon* (Farrar Straus, 1999) and *A Name on the Quilt* (Atheneum, 1999).

Hector Viveros Lee was born in Calexico, California, and grew up in California's San Joaquin Valley. He earned his fine arts degree in illustration from the Academy of Art in San Francisco. Lee has been an elementary school teacher since 1986, but he also always wanted to be an artist. He takes pride in drawing from his Latin American heritage for inspiration. Lee currently lives in San Francisco.

Lee made his picture book debut as the author and illustrator of *I Had A Hippopotamus*, a story about a Mexican American boy who is inspired by a box of animal crackers to imagine what he would do with an array of unique creatures. The book was created for his students who enjoyed its many surprises and unpredictable illustrations. Lee was also highlighted in a *Publishers Weekly* "Flying Starts" feature, where the book was praised as "a winning spin on the notion that 'tis better to give than to receive."

Awards & Reviews

- **"Choices"**, Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC)
- **Selected as Outstanding by Parent Council**

"A winning story of competition, perseverance, and pride in accomplishment. Jessenia's swim team is slated for its first away meet and she's nervous..however, with her coach's encouragement and her mother's support, she finds the strength to win her last race..good choice that nicely fills the void of picture books about girls involved in team sports." –*School Library Journal*

"The well-executed artwork is strong in both design and color, and conveys both the trepidation and excitement that Jessenia feels as she approaches and participates in the meet." –*Booklist*

Resources on the Web

Learn more about *Get Set! Swim!*:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/167/pb/get_set_swim

Get Set! Swim! in Spanish:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/168/pb/preparadas_listas_ya

Other books by Jeannine Atkins:

Aani And The Tree Huggers:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/7/pb/aani_and_the_tree_huggers

Other books written and illustrated Hector Viveros Lee:

I Had A Hippopotamus

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/65/pb/i_had_a_hippopotamus

I Had A Hippopotamus in Spanish:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/162/bb/yo_tenia_un_hipopotamo

Booktalk with Hector Viveros Lee about *I Had A Hippopotamus*:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/hvlee2.mhtml>

View other **Active Reader Classroom Guides** at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/p/teachers-latino_hispanic.mhtml

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