

## Before You Read

### Catch the Moon

Meet **Judith Ortiz Cofer**  
(born 1952)

**L**atina wherever I am," is the way Judith Ortiz Cofer sees herself. When she was a child, her family moved from her birthplace of Puerto Rico to Paterson, New Jersey. However, they made frequent trips back to Puerto Rico, so she always felt close to her cultural roots. She has a childhood memory of sitting in her grandmother's living room, which was furnished with mahogany rocking chairs. "It was on these rockers that my mother, her sisters and my grandmother sat on these afternoons of my childhood to tell their stories, teaching each other and my cousin and me what it was like to be a woman, more specifically, a Puerto Rican woman."

*"I write in English, yet I write  
obsessively about my Puerto Rican  
experience."*

—Judith Ortiz Cofer

**Bilingual Advantage** Early on, Cofer experienced a disadvantage of the family's frequent moving. Cofer was teased for having "a Spanish accent when [she] spoke English; and, when [she] spoke Spanish, [she] was told that [she] sounded like a 'Gringa.'" Cofer transformed this into an advantage when she began writing fiction and poetry. Writer Marian C. Gonsior says that Cofer deals with "the effect on Puerto Rican Americans of living in a world split between the island culture of their homeland and the teeming tenement life of the United States." After receiving her bachelor's degree from Augusta College in Georgia, Cofer



began her long teaching career, first as a bilingual teacher in Florida public schools and then as an English and Spanish teacher at colleges and universities. She is currently the Franklin Professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Georgia, Athens.

**Writer of Poetry and Fiction** In graduate school Cofer began writing poetry in order to express the concerns of Latina women. Cofer believes that "poetry has made me more disciplined. . . . Poetry taught me about economizing in language and about the power of language." Ten years later, Cofer began writing fiction, and her first novel, *The Line of the Sun*, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1989. Cofer has also written *An Island Like You: Stories of the Barrio*, a book of short stories for young adults. The stories are set in Paterson, New Jersey, and deal with the problems facing Puerto Rican teenagers. Chicana author Sandra Cisneros says, "In these stories, both hilarious and tragic, [Cofer] has captured the isolated lives of those wobbling between two clashing cultures—childhood and adulthood." "Catch the Moon" is one of the stories in *An Island Like You*.



Literature Online

**Author Search** For more about Judith Ortiz Cofer, go to [glencoe.com](http://glencoe.com) and enter QuickPass code GL59794u1.



## Literature and Reading Preview

### Connect to the Story

Why does gift giving make the giver feel good? Freewrite for a few minutes about a gift you have given someone and how it made you feel to give it.

### Build Background

A *barrio* is an urban neighborhood where most of the people are of Hispanic heritage. People in a *barrio* may have been born in the United States or have come from Spanish-speaking countries. Hubcaps, or wheel covers, come in thousands of different styles. While they are mostly for show, hubcaps do keep dirt and moisture away from the wheel nuts and bearings in a car's wheel assembly.

### Set Purposes for Reading

#### Big Idea Life Transitions

As you read "Catch the Moon," ask yourself, How does a self-centered young man learn the value of giving selflessly?

#### Literary Element Point of View

**Point of view** is the standpoint from which a story is told. In a **third-person limited point of view**, the narrator describes events as one character perceives them. This enables readers to learn a lot about this particular character's thoughts and feelings, though the information about other characters is much more limited. As you read, ask yourself, Why did Cofer choose to tell the story from the third-person limited point of view?

#### Reading Strategy Interpret Imagery

Writers use **imagery**, details that appeal to the senses, to help readers see, hear, smell, taste, or feel what the writer is describing. As you read, ask yourself, What are examples of imagery in this story? What do they signify?

**Tip: Take Notes** Use a chart like the one below to record instances of imagery and your interpretation of them.

Imagery	Interpretation
p. 220 "steel jungle of his car junkyard"	Here "steel jungle" is used figuratively to suggest a place that is hard and dense with debris.

### Learning Objectives

For pages 218–228

In studying this text, you will focus on the following objectives:

**Literary Study:** Analyzing point of view.

**Reading:** Interpreting imagery.

### Vocabulary

**harass** (hə ras') *v.* to bother or annoy repeatedly; p. 221 *Several times a day the bully would harass the children.*

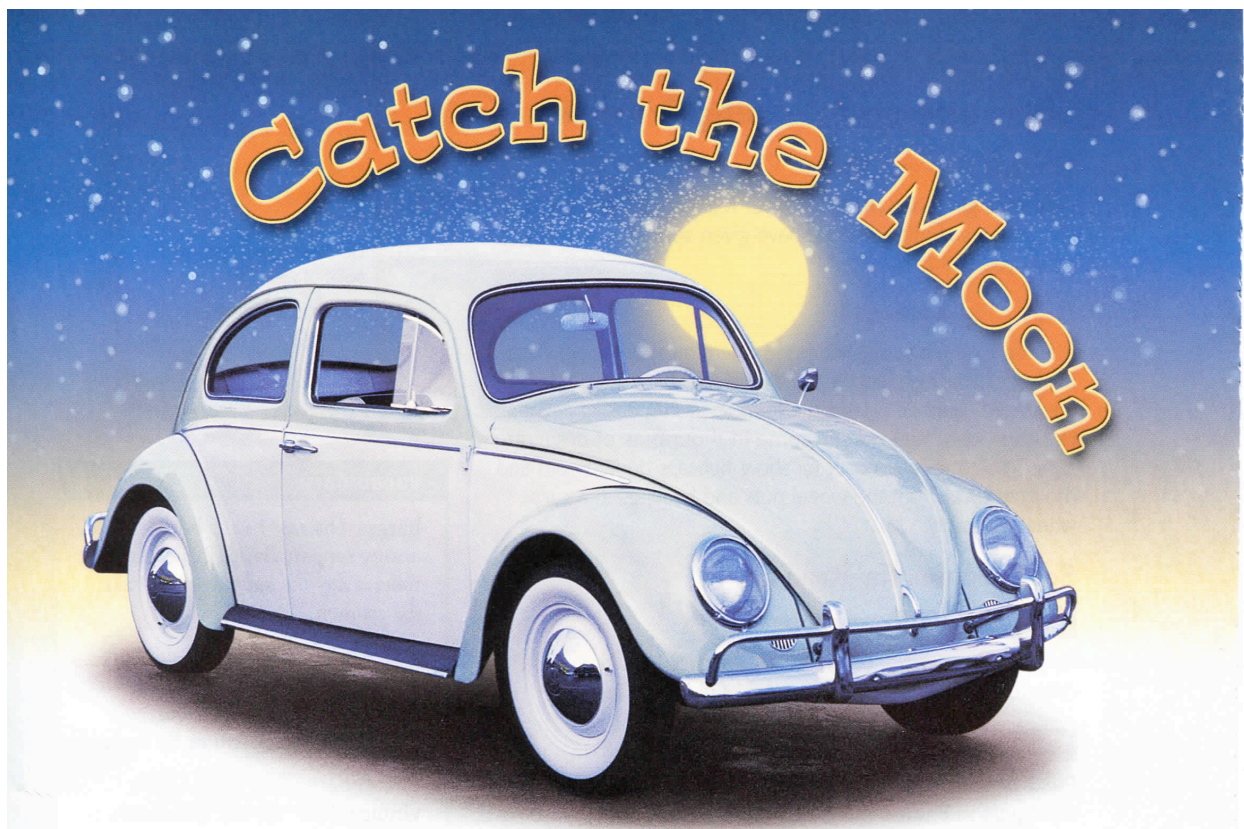
**makeshift** (māk'shift') *adj.* suitable as a temporary substitute for the proper or desired thing; p. 222 *He used a tent as his makeshift home.*

**vintage** (vin'tij) *adj.* characterized by enduring appeal; classic; p. 222 *He drove a vintage Model T car.*

**decapitate** (di kap'ə tāt') *v.* to cut off the head of; p. 223 *We watched the hunter decapitate the elk he had shot.*

**relic** (rel'ik) *n.* an object that has survived decay, destruction, or the passage of time and is valued for its historic interest; p. 225 *We saw a knight's armor and other relics at the museum.*





Judith Ortiz Cofer

**L**uis Cintrón sits on top of a six-foot pile of hubcaps and watches his father walk away into the steel jungle of his car junkyard. Released into his old man's custody after six months in juvenile hall—for breaking and entering—and he didn't even take anything. He did it on a dare.

But the old lady with the million cats was a light sleeper, and good with her aluminum cane. He has a scar on his head to prove it.

Now Luis is wondering whether he should have stayed in and done his full time. Jorge Cintrón of Jorge Cintrón & Son, Auto Parts and Salvage, has decided that Luis should wash and polish every hubcap in the yard. The hill he is sitting on is only the latest couple of hundred wheel covers

that have come in. Luis grunts and stands up on top of his silver mountain. He yells at no one, "Someday, son, all this will be yours," and sweeps his arms like the Pope blessing a crowd over the piles of car sandwiches and mounds of metal parts that cover this acre of land outside the city. He is the "Son" of Jorge Cintrón & Son, and so far his father has had more than one reason to wish it was plain Jorge Cintrón on the sign.

Luis has been getting in trouble since he started high school two years ago,

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**Interpret Imagery** What does this image tell you about Luis?

mainly because of the “social group” he organized—a bunch of guys who were into **harassing** the local authorities. Their thing was taking something to the limit on a dare or, better still, doing something dangerous, like breaking into a house, not to steal, just to prove that they could do it. That was Luis’s specialty, coming up with very complicated plans, like military strategies, and assigning the “jobs” to guys who wanted to join the Tiburones.<sup>1</sup>

*Tiburón* means “shark,” and Luis had gotten the name from watching an old movie<sup>2</sup> about a Puerto Rican gang called the Sharks with his father. Luis thought it was one of the dumbest films he had ever seen. Everybody sang their lines, and the guys all pointed their toes and leaped in the air when they were supposed to be slaughtering each other. But he liked their name, the Sharks, so he made it Spanish and had it air-painted on his black T-shirt with a killer shark under it, jaws opened wide and dripping with blood. It didn’t take long for other guys in the barrio to ask about it.

Man, had they had a good time. The girls were interested too. Luis outsmarted everybody by calling his organization a social club and registering it at Central High. That meant they were legal, even let out of last-period class on Fridays for their “club” meetings. It was just this year, after a couple of botched<sup>3</sup> jobs, that the teachers had started getting suspicious. The first

one to go wrong was when he sent Kenny Matoa to *borrow* some “souvenirs” out of Anita Robles’s locker. He got caught. It seems that Matoa had been reading Anita’s diary and didn’t hear her coming down the hall. Anita was supposed to be in the gym at that time but had copped out with the usual female excuse of cramps. You could hear her screams all the way to Market Street.

She told the principal all she knew about the Tiburones, and Luis had to talk fast to convince old Mr. Williams that the club did put on cultural activities such as the Save the Animals talent show. What Mr. Williams didn’t know was that the animal that was being “saved” with the ticket sales was Luis’s pet boa, which needed quite a few live mice to stay healthy and happy. They kept E.S. (which stood for “Endangered Species”) in Luis’s room, but she belonged to the club and it was the members’ responsibility to raise the money to feed their mascot. So last year they had sponsored their first annual Save the Animals talent show, and it had been a great success. The Tiburones had come dressed as Latino Elvises and did a grand finale to “All Shook Up” that made the audience go wild. Mr. Williams had smiled while Luis talked, maybe remembering how the math teacher, Mrs. Laguna, had dragged him out in the aisle to rock-and-roll with her. Luis had gotten out of that one, but barely.

His father was a problem too. He objected to the T-shirt logo, calling it disgusting and vulgar. Mr. Cintrón prided himself on his own neat, elegant style of dressing after work, and on his manners and large vocabulary, which he picked up by taking correspondence courses in just about everything.

1. *Tiburones* (tē’ boo rō’ nās)

2. [old movie...] The narrator is describing the feature film *West Side Story*, a 1961 musical based on Shakespeare’s play *Romeo and Juliet*, set in the youth gang atmosphere of New York City in the late 1950s.

3. *Botched* means “badly or clumsily done.”

#### Vocabulary

**harass** (hə ras’) *v.* to bother or annoy repeatedly

**Life Transitions** Do you think that Luis feels any remorse for the actions of the Tiburones at this point? Explain.



Luis thought that it was just his way of staying busy since Luis's mother had died, almost three years ago, of cancer. He had never gotten over it.

All this was going through Luis's head as he slid down the hill of hubcaps. The tub full of soapy water, the can of polish, and the bag of rags had been neatly placed in front of a **makeshift** table made from two car seats and a piece of plywood. Luis heard a car drive up and someone honk their horn. His father emerged from inside a new red Mustang that had been totaled. He usually dismantled every small feature by hand before sending the vehicle into the *cementerio*,<sup>4</sup> as he called the lot. Luis watched as the most beautiful girl he had ever seen climbed out of a **vintage** white Volkswagen Bug. She stood in the sunlight in her white sundress waiting for his father, while Luis stared. She was like a smooth wood carving. Her skin was mahogany, almost black, and her arms and legs were long and thin, but curved in places so that she did not look bony and hard—more like a ballerina. And her ebony hair was braided close to her head. Luis let his breath out, feeling a little dizzy. He had forgotten to breathe. Both the girl and his father heard him. Mr. Cintrón waved him over.

"Luis, the señorita here has lost a wheel cover. Her car is twenty-five years old, so

it will not be an easy match. Come look on this side."

Luis tossed a wrench he'd been holding into a toolbox like he was annoyed, just to make a point about slave labor. Then he followed his father, who knelt on the gravel and began to point out every detail of the hubcap. Luis was hardly listening. He watched the girl take a piece of paper from her handbag.

"Señor Cintrón, I have drawn the hubcap for you, since I will have to leave soon. My home address and telephone number are here, and also my parents' office number." She handed the paper to Mr. Cintrón, who nodded.

"Sí, señorita, very good. This will help my son look for it. Perhaps there is one in that stack there." He pointed to the pile of caps that Luis was supposed to wash and polish. "Yes, I'm almost certain that there is a match there. Of course, I do not know if it's near the top or the bottom. You will give us a few days, yes?"

Luis just stared at his father like he was crazy. But he didn't say anything because the girl was smiling at him with a funny expression on her face. Maybe she thought he had X-ray eyes like Superman, or maybe she was mocking him.

"Please call me Naomi, Señor Cintrón. You know my mother. She is the director of the funeral home. . . ." Mr. Cintrón seemed surprised at first; he prided himself on having a great memory. Then his friendly expression changed to one of sadness as he recalled the day of his wife's burial. Naomi did not finish her sentence. She reached over and placed her hand on Mr. Cintrón's arm for a moment. Then she said "Adiós" softly, and got in her shiny white car. She waved to them as she left, and her gold bracelets flashing in the sun nearly blinded Luis.

4. *Cementerio* (se men tā' rē ō) is Spanish for "cemetery."

**Point of View** What does this sentence tell you about Luis?

**Interpret Imagery** How would you interpret the description of the beautiful girl in the midst of the junkyard?

#### Vocabulary

**makeshift** (māk'shift') *adj.* suitable as a temporary substitute for the proper or desired thing

**vintage** (vin'tij) *adj.* characterized by enduring appeal; classic

**Point of View** Why do you think Luis reacts this way?



September 16, c. 1955. René Magritte. Oil on canvas, 14 x 10<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts. ©ARS, NY.

**View the Art** René Magritte, a Belgian Surrealist painter, often includes elements of mystery, comedy, and danger in his art. In what ways does this painting express the title and mood of the story?

Mr. Cintrón shook his head. “How about that,” he said as if to himself. “They are the Dominican owners of Ramirez Funeral Home.” And, with a sigh, “She seems like such a nice young woman. Reminds me of your mother when she was her age.”

Hearing the funeral parlor’s name, Luis remembered too. The day his mother died, he had been in her room at the hospital while his father had gone for coffee. The alarm had gone off on her monitor and nurses had come running in, pushing him outside. After that, all he recalled was the anger that had made him punch a hole in his bedroom wall. And afterward he had refused to talk to anyone at the funeral. Strange, he did see a black girl there who didn’t try like the others to talk to him, but actually ignored him as

she escorted family members to the viewing room and brought flowers in. Could it be that the skinny girl in a frilly white dress had been Naomi? She didn’t act like she had recognized him today, though. Or maybe she thought that he was a jerk.

Luis grabbed the drawing from his father. The old man looked like he wanted to walk down memory lane. But Luis was in no mood to listen to the old stories about his falling in love on a tropical island. The world they’d lived in before he was born wasn’t his world. No beaches and palm trees here. Only junk as far as he could see. He climbed back up his hill and studied Naomi’s sketch. It had obviously been done very carefully. It was signed “Naomi Ramirez” in the lower right-hand corner. He memorized the telephone number.

Luis washed hubcaps all day until his hands were red and raw, but he did not come across the small silver bowl that would fit the VW. After work he took a few practice Frisbee shots across the yard before showing his rows and rows of shiny rings drying in the sun. His father nodded and showed him the bump on his temple where one of Luis’s flying saucers had gotten him. “Practice makes perfect, you know. Next time you’ll probably **decapitate** me.” Luis heard him struggle with the word *decapitate*, which Mr. Cintrón pronounced in syllables. Showing off his big vocabulary again, Luis thought. He looked closely at the bump, though. He felt bad about it.

“They look good, hijo.”<sup>5</sup> Mr. Cintrón made a sweeping gesture with his arms over the yard. “You know, all this will have to be

5. *Hijo* (ē’ hō) is Spanish for “son.”

**Life Transitions** Does this passage show a change in Luis’s attitude? Explain.

#### Vocabulary

**decapitate** (dī kap’ə tā’t) *v.* to cut off the head of





*Scrap Merchant*, 1983. Reg Cartwright. Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 76.2 cm. Private collection.

**View the Art** Reg Cartwright is a British painter and illustrator whose work is influenced by Cubism. What might this painting suggest about how Luis might feel while working in his father's junkyard?

classified. My dream is to have all the parts divided by year, make of car, and condition. Maybe now that you are here to help me, this will happen."

"Pop . . ." Luis put his hand on his father's shoulder. They were the same height and build, about five foot six and muscular. "The judge said six months of free labor for you, not life, okay?" Mr. Cintrón nodded, looking distracted. It was then that Luis suddenly noticed how gray his hair had turned—it used to be shiny black like his own—and that there were deep lines in his face. His father had turned into an old man and he hadn't even noticed.

"Son, you must follow the judge's instructions. Like she said, next time you get in trouble, she's going to treat you like an adult, and I think you know what that means. Hard time, no breaks."

"Yeah, yeah. That's what I'm doing, right? Working my hands to the bone instead of enjoying my summer. But listen, she didn't put me under house arrest, right? I'm going out tonight."

"Home by ten. She did say something about a curfew, Luis." Mr. Cintrón had stopped smiling and was looking upset. It had always been hard for them to talk more than a minute or two before his father got offended at something Luis said, or at his sarcastic tone. He was always doing something wrong.

Luis threw the rag down on the table and went to sit in his father's ancient Buick, which was in mint condition. They drove home in silence.

After sitting down at the kitchen table with his father to eat a pizza they had picked up on the way home, Luis asked to borrow the car. He didn't get an answer then, just a look that meant "Don't bother me right now."

Before bringing up the subject again, Luis put some ice cubes in a Baggie and handed it to Mr. Cintrón, who had made the little bump on his head worse by rubbing it. It had GUILTY written on it, Luis thought.

"Gracias, hijo." His father placed the bag on the bump and made a face as the ice touched his skin.

They ate in silence for a few minutes more; then Luis decided to ask about the car again.

"I really need some fresh air, Pop. Can I borrow the car for a couple of hours?"

"You don't get enough fresh air at the yard? We're lucky that we don't have to sit in a smelly old factory all day. You know that?"

"Yeah, Pop. We're real lucky." Luis always felt irritated that his father was so grateful to own a junkyard, but he held his anger back and just waited to see if he'd get the keys without having to get in an argument.

"Where are you going?"

"For a ride. Not going anywhere. Just out for a while. Is that okay?"

**Point of View** Do you think Mr. Cintrón would agree with Luis's perception?

His father didn't answer, just handed him a set of keys, as shiny as the day they were manufactured. His father polished everything that could be polished: door-knobs, coins, keys, spoons, knives, and forks, like he was King Midas counting his silver and gold. Luis thought his father must be really lonely to polish utensils only he used anymore. They had been picked out by his wife, though, so they were like **relics**. Nothing she had ever owned could be thrown away. Only now the dishes, forks,



#### Visual Vocabulary

A **plantain** (plant'ən) is a tropical fruit similar to a banana that must be cooked before eating.

and spoons were not used to eat the yellow rice and red beans, the fried chicken, or the mouth-watering sweet plantains that his mother had cooked for them. They were just kept in the cabinets that his father had turned into a museum for her. Mr. Cintrón

could cook as well as his wife, but he didn't have the heart to do it anymore. Luis thought that maybe if they ate together once in a while things might get better between them, but he always had something to do around dinnertime and ended up at a hamburger joint. Tonight was the first time in months they had sat down at the table together.

Luis took the keys. "Thanks," he said, walking out to take his shower. His father kept looking at him with those sad, patient eyes. "Okay. I'll be back by ten, and keep the ice on that egg," Luis said without looking back.

**Interpret Imagery** Why do you think Mr. Cintrón takes such good care of his wife's belongings?

#### Vocabulary

**relic** (rel'ik) n. an object that has survived decay, destruction, or the passage of time and is valued for its historic interest

He had just meant to ride around his old barrio, see if any of the Tiburones were hanging out at El Building, where most of them lived. It wasn't far from the single-family home his father had bought when the business started paying off: a house that his mother lived in for three months before she took up residence at St. Joseph's Hospital. She never came home again. These days Luis wished he still lived in that tiny apartment where there was always something to do, somebody to talk to.

Instead Luis found himself parked in front of the last place his mother had gone to: Ramirez Funeral Home. In the front yard was a huge oak tree that Luis remembered having climbed during the funeral to get away from people. The tree looked different now, not like a skeleton, as it had then, but green with leaves. The branches reached to the second floor of the house, where the family lived.

For a while Luis sat in the car allowing the memories to flood back into his brain. He remembered his mother before the illness changed her. She had not been beautiful, as his father told everyone; she had been a sweet lady, not pretty but not ugly. To him, she had been the person who always told him that she was proud of him and loved him. She did that every night when she came to his bedroom door to say good-night. As a joke he would sometimes ask her, "Proud of what? I haven't done anything." And she'd always say, "I'm just proud that you are my son." She wasn't perfect or anything. She had bad days when nothing he did could make her smile, especially after she got sick. But he never heard her say anything negative about anyone. She always blamed *el destino*, fate, for what went wrong. He missed her. He missed her so much.



Suddenly a flood of tears that had been building up for almost three years started pouring from his eyes. Luis sat in his father's car, with his head on the steering wheel, and cried, "Mami, I miss you."

When he finally looked up, he saw that he was being watched. Sitting at a large window with a pad and a pencil on her lap was Naomi. At first Luis felt angry and embarrassed, but she wasn't laughing at him. Then she told him with her dark eyes that it was okay to come closer. He walked to the window, and she held up the sketch pad on which she had drawn him, not crying like a baby, but sitting on top of a mountain of silver disks, holding one up over his head. He had to smile.

The plate-glass window was locked. It had a security bolt on it. An alarm system, he figured, so nobody would steal the princess. He asked her if he could come in. It was soundproof too. He mouthed the words slowly for her to read his lips. She wrote on the pad, "I can't let you in. My mother is not home tonight." So they looked at each other and talked through the window for a little while. Then Luis got an idea. He signed to her that he'd be back, and drove to the junkyard.

Luis climbed up on his mountain of hubcaps. For hours he sorted the wheel covers by make, size, and condition, stopping only to call his father and tell him where he was and what he was doing. The old man did not ask him for explanations, and Luis was grateful for that. By lamppost light, Luis worked and worked, beginning to understand a little why his father kept

busy all the time. Doing something that had a beginning, a middle, and an end did something to your head. It was like the satisfaction Luis got out of planning "adventures" for his Tiburones, but there was another element involved here that had nothing to do with showing off for others. This was a treasure hunt. And he knew what he was looking for.

Finally, when it seemed that it was a hopeless search, when it was almost midnight and Luis's hands were cut and bruised from his work, he found it. It was the perfect match for Naomi's drawing, the moon-shaped wheel cover for her car, Cinderella's shoe. Luis jumped off the small mound of disks left under him and shouted, "Yes!" He looked around and saw neat stacks of hubcaps that he would wash the next day. He would build a display wall for his father. People would be able to come into the yard and point to whatever they wanted.

Luis washed the VW hubcap and polished it until he could see himself in it. He used it as a mirror as he washed his face and combed his hair. Then he drove to the Ramirez Funeral Home. It was almost pitch-black, since it was a moonless night. As quietly as possible, Luis put some gravel in his pocket and climbed the oak tree to the second floor. He knew he was in front of Naomi's window—he could see her shadow through the curtains. She was at a table, apparently writing or drawing, maybe waiting for him. Luis hung the silver disk carefully on a branch near the window, then threw the gravel at the glass. Naomi ran to the window and drew the curtains aside while Luis held on to the thick branch and waited to give her the first good thing he had given anyone in a long time. 🌹

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**Interpret Imagery** What does the imagery of a flood suggest about Luis's emotional response?

**Point of View** How does this passage demonstrate the third-person limited point of view?

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**Life Transitions** What do you think the last sentence of the story means?



# After You Read

## Respond and Think Critically

### Respond and Interpret

1. (a) Were you surprised by Luis's actions at the end of the story? Explain. (b) How did your feelings about Luis change as you read the story?
2. Why does Luis work at his father's junkyard?
3. (a) Describe the relationship between Luis and his father. (b) Do you think there is a chance for Luis and his father to build a better relationship? Use details from the story to support your answer.
4. (a) What does Luis leave in the tree for Naomi? (b) What do you think Luis discovers about himself as he searches for his gift to Naomi?

### Analyze and Evaluate

5. In what ways can Naomi be compared with Luis's mother?

6. Explain how Luis also gives a gift to his father as he searches for the hubcap.

### Connect

7. **Big Idea Life Transitions** The story begins with Luis sitting on a pile of hubcaps and ends with him hanging a hubcap in a tree. What kind of character transition has Luis made by the end of the story?

8. **Connect to the Author** As a child, Judith Ortiz Cofer spoke both English and Spanish but struggled with each. In the story, Luis's father is enrolled in a correspondence class to improve his vocabulary. Why is it important to the father to have a good vocabulary? Do you think the author has the same beliefs? Explain.

### Literary Element Point of View

The third-person limited narrator of "Catch the Moon" describes events as only Luis perceives them. Readers hear Luis's thoughts as he describes his gang activities and comments on his father and Naomi. Readers have to judge whether Luis's comments are fair and infer what his thoughts reveal about his character. Readers also should be alert to dramatic irony in the story: a contrast between what Luis thinks and what the reader knows is true.

1. The narrator does not reveal Naomi's opinion of Luis. After she leaves the junkyard, Luis worries if "maybe she thought that he was a jerk." How accurate is Luis's concern?
2. The narrator reveals Luis's pride in his gang activities. Contrast Luis's feelings about his gang activities with your own perspective on gangs. What dramatic irony do you notice?

### Plot and Setting

**Plot** is the series of events that make up a story. **Setting** is the time and place in which the story takes place. As you learned on pages 8–9, a key feature of the plot is exposition, which introduces the story's characters, setting, and situation.

**Partner Activity** Meet with a classmate to discuss what the exposition of the story reveals about Luis, specifically regarding the setting he is in and why he is there. Working with your partner, create a chart similar to the one below and fill it with details about Luis, the setting, and his situation.

Details About Luis	Setting Details	Situation Details
gang leader	junkyard	released into custody of his father