



## Common Core State Anchor Standards Aligned Educator Guide for Grades 7 to 12

# I AM NOT ALONE

**Age Range:** 12 years and up

**Grade Level:** 7 - 9

**Publisher:** Scholastic Press

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### About the book:

Alberto's life isn't easy: He's an undocumented immigrant from Mexico who lives with his sister's abusive boyfriend—but he'd always accepted his place in the world. Until he starts hearing the voice of a man called Captain America, a voice that wants him to achieve more, no matter the cost.

Grace has it all: She has a supportive boyfriend, she's on track to be valedictorian, and she's sure to go to the college of her dreams. Still, nothing feels right to her any more after the divorce of her parents, and feels she needs something more.

When Alberto and Grace meet, they have an immediate and electric connection. But when Alberto is present at the scene of a terrible crime, he becomes a suspect. And with his developing schizophrenia, he's not even sure he believes in his own innocence.

Can Grace find a way to prove Alberto's innocence to himself and the world?

★ *An affecting, deeply emotional story. An important book. -- Booklist*

★ *An illuminatingly powerful story about mental illness, young love, faith, and hope. -- Kirkus Reviews*

### About the author:

Francisco X. Stork was born in Monterrey, Mexico. He came to El Paso, Texas with his adoptive father when he was nine-years-old. He studied English Literature and Philosophy at Spring Hill College, a Jesuit College in Mobile Alabama. He obtained an M.A. from Harvard University where he studied Latin American Literature with, among others, Octavio Paz, the Mexican Nobel Laureate. After four years of graduate studies at Harvard, he entered Columbia Law School. After graduating from law school, he practiced law in a number of private and public settings while pursuing his vocation to write. For the last fifteen years of his legal career, Francisco worked as an attorney for a Massachusetts State Agency that develops affordable housing. Francisco retired from the practice of law in April of 2015.



### Pre-reading discussion:

- When considering the imagery featured on the book cover, predict the relationship between the two characters featured in the graphic. What is their connection? How do they feel about each other? Identify the visual cues that communicate what their relationship might be like.
- Analyze the use of color in the graphic. Determine what the use of bright and dark hues suggest about the overall theme of the book?
- Notice the composition and layout of the illustration. Tell what the placement of the characters suggest about characterization and the plot of the story.
- The term visual metaphors refers to the use of images to represent concepts, ideas, or emotions. Describe the emotional resonance between the two characters. Identify the graphic elements that suggest what concepts, ideas, or emotions I AM NOT ALONE will explore.
- Predict what I AM NOT ALONE is going to be about. Identify visual cues in the book cover graphic to support your claim.

### Post-reading discussion:

*It took Grace a moment to realize that Micheal was not speaking to her. She turned and saw Alberto standing in the hallway. "Excuse me, miss." Alberto's eyes remained fixed on Grace. "Is everything all right" (pg. 39)?*

- The term *persona* references one's social mask, an individual's identity, and how they are perceived in society. Compare and contrast Alberto, Grace, and Michael's personas. Identify how the characters share some similarities with one another. Tell how they differ.
- In this scene, despite being persistently tormented by the cruel voice of Captain America, Alberto demonstrates sensitivity and concern for Grace's wellbeing. What does this act of kindness reveal about Alberto's character?
- Should Alberto care about Grace? Should Grace become involved in Alberto's personal and mental struggles? List everything that is wrong about their relationship. Identify everything that is right.
- Answer Alberto's question. Is everything all right? Why or why not?

## Post-reading discussion continued:

*The strange thing about Captain America was how he used words that Alberto had never heard before. Maggot. Riddance. He didn't speak like that. If Captain America was in his brain, why didn't he speak to him in Spanish (pg. 84).*

- Individuals who suffer from schizophrenia often experience *auditory hallucinations*, meaning that they hear voices that can be perceived as coming from within their own minds or from external sources. Oftentimes, these voices assume distinct personalities and can be highly critical and demanding. Tell how Captain America's English speaking contributed to Alberto's belief that the voice inside his head was real.
- Individuals who exhibit schizophrenic tendencies are often fearful, exhibiting bouts of anxiety, depression, and a loss of control over their own thoughts and actions. Identify moments in the text when Alberto displayed such tendencies.
- The word *altruism* means demonstrating a willingness to sacrifice personal resources, time, or effort for the benefit of others. Throughout the story, Grace demonstrates deep empathy, sympathy, and compassion for Alberto's plight. Could it be that her altruistic acts were inspired by a deeper need she felt within herself? Explain your answer.

*The police are coming for you. They found out you killed Wayne's aunt. Get your money. Now. Throw away your phone (pg. 103).*

- The warning text sent to Alberto came from his sister Lupe's phone. Discuss how the shock of receiving a text such as this would contribute to Alberto's feelings of powerlessness and confusion.
- Alberto was accused of killing a woman, an act that he had no recollection of committing. Being that his mental illness keeps him in a state of doubt and confusion, could it be possible that he actually did commit the crime? If so, wouldn't the act be horrific enough for him to remember doing so? Why or why not?
- Prior to receiving the text, Wayne spoke to Alberto in an uncharacteristically kind tone, encouraging him to stay in the apartment and offering to bring him food. State the reasons for Wayne's failed attempt to deceive Alberto.
- Is it possible that Alberto did kill Wayne's aunt, Mrs. Macpherson? Is it probable? How so?

*"I'm not afraid of Captain America," Benny said after a few moments of reflection. "You shouldn't be either" (pg. 176).*

- One of the first steps in confronting mental health issues is to become aware that they exist and to acknowledge that work needs to be done to develop the courage to face troubling issues. Explain how Benny's defiant attitude towards Captain America communicates acceptance, courage, and hope for healing.
- Learning to control fear-inducing thoughts and emotions brought about by mental illness requires not only bravery, but a willingness to explore the root causes of one's emotional struggles. Examine situations in which both Alberto and Grace gained the strength to do so.
- The word *trust* means dependability, steadfastness, acceptance, and faith. Determine how developing the ability to trust led both Alberto and Grace to a place of hope and healing. Discuss ways that they had to learn how to develop a sense of trust in others, and – ultimately – within themselves.

## Project: Mental Health Issues Warning Signs

Access the printable on the following page. Consider the statements featured in the columns labeled *Symptom*. Search through the book to discover where in the text either Alberto or Grace demonstrated the symptom. Cite the page number and a quote from the text where the symptom was revealed in the text in the spaces provided. Write a short essay examining reasons why Alberto or Grace seemed unaware that they were experiencing mental disorders, while it had become quite apparent to those around them.

**Mental Health Issues Warning Signs**

Consider the symptoms listed in the columns below. Search through the text to discover where in the text either Alberto or Grace demonstrated an experience. Cite the page number and a quote from the text where they were experiencing mental disorders, while it had become quite apparent to those around them.

Symptom	Chapter (pg.)	Quote from text
<b>Schizophrenia</b>		
Beliefs or thoughts that are not based in reality, such as hearing voices, seeing things, or believing in unusual events, being persecuted by evil forces, etc.		
Thoughts, actions, or feelings that are not your own. Auditory hallucinations (hearing voices) are common in people with schizophrenia.		
Schizophrenia can also impact people's thinking, leading to difficulties with memory, attention, and problem-solving abilities which affect a person's ability to work, learn, and engage in daily activities.		
<b>Depression</b>		
Having difficulty concentrating, making decisions or experiencing memory problems.		
Experiencing feelings of hopelessness, guilt, or excessive self-criticism.		
Experiencing a loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed.		

**Special Note:** If you or someone you know is going through symptoms of a Schizophrenia and/or Depression, it's really important to reach out for help. There are many resources available for mental health problems. For proper diagnosis and treatment, please call your primary care and health care providers. Support can make a huge difference in improving outcomes and helping people reach their full potential. For help, please call 1-800-950-NAMI.

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## Mental Health Issues Warning Signs

Consider the statements featured in the columns labeled Symptom. Search through the book to discover where in the text either Alberto or Grace demonstrated the symptom. Cite the page number and a quote from the text where the symptom was revealed in the text in the spaces provided. Write a short essay examining reasons why Alberto or Grace seemed unaware that they were experiencing mental disorders, while it had become quite apparent to those around them.

### Schizophrenia

<i>Symptom</i>	<i>Citation (pg.)</i>	<i>Quote from text</i>
Believing in delusional things that are not based in reality, such as having special powers, being controlled by external forces, or having paranoid beliefs.		
Hearing, seeing, or feeling things that others do not perceive. Auditory hallucinations, such as hearing voices, are commonly associated with schizophrenia.		
Schizophrenia can also impact cognitive functioning, leading to difficulties with attention, memory, and problem-solving abilities which affect a person's ability to work, study, and engage in daily activities.		

### Depression

<i>Symptom</i>	<i>Citation (pg.)</i>	<i>Quote from text</i>
Having difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or experiencing memory problems.		
Experiencing feelings of worthlessness, guilt, or excessive self-criticism.		
Experiencing a loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed.		

**Special Note:** If you or someone you know is going through symptoms of schizophrenia and/or depression, it's really important to reach out to a healthcare provider or mental health specialist for proper diagnosis and suitable treatment. Getting help early on and having ongoing support can make a huge difference in improving outcomes and helping individuals lead fulfilling lives despite the challenges that come with these conditions.

