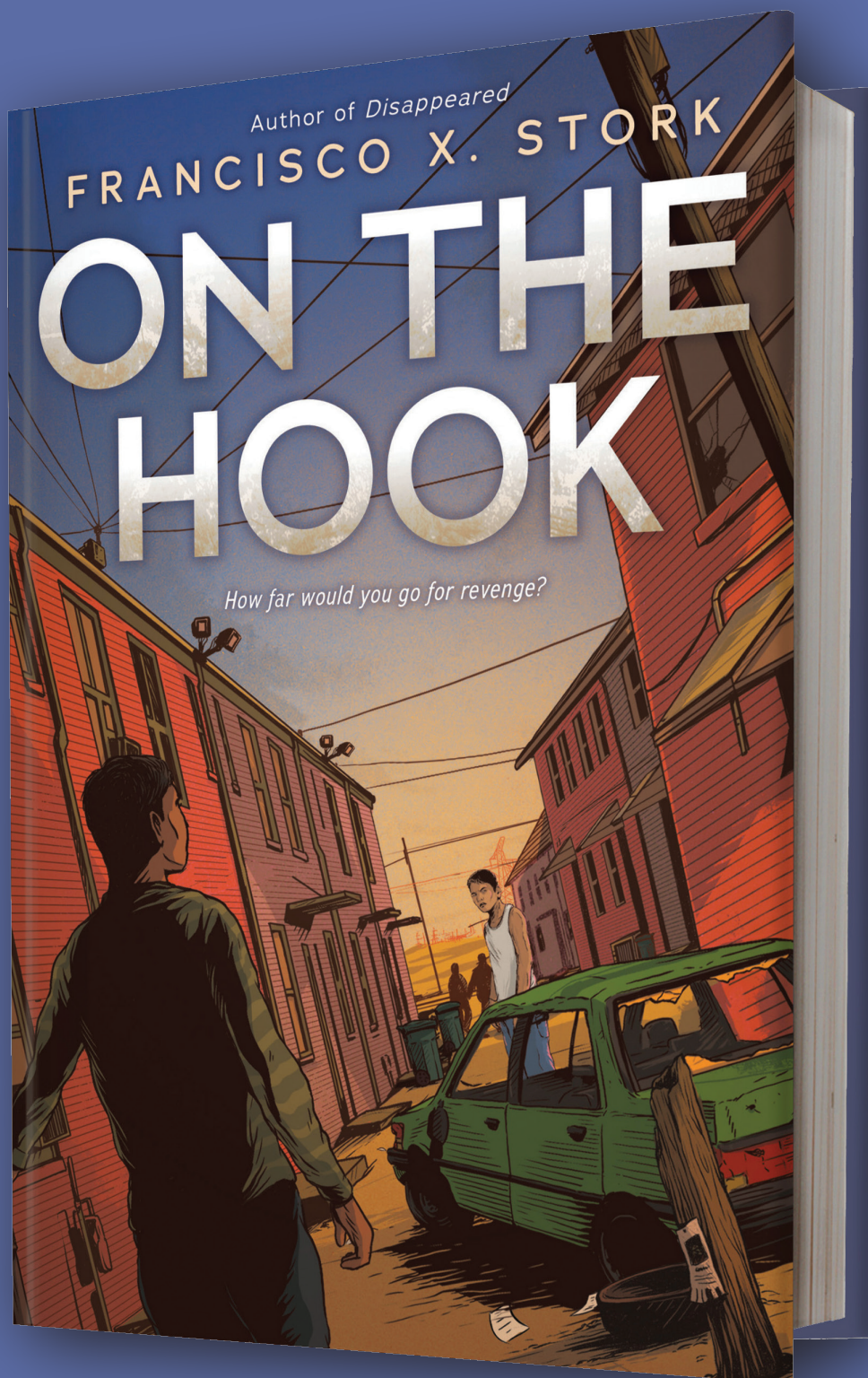


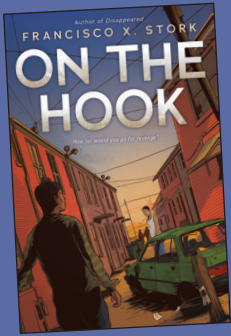
DISCUSSION GUIDE



ON THE HOOK

BY
FRANCISCO
X. STORK

Ages 12 and up
Grades 7 and up



ABOUT *ON THE HOOK*

Hector has always minded his own business, working hard to make his way to a better life someday. He's the chess team champion, helps the family with his job at a grocery store, and teaches his little sister to shoot hoops overhand.

Until Joey singles him out. Joey, whose older brother, Chavo, is the biggest drug dealer in the projects where they all live. Joey tells Hector that he's going to kill him one day. And Hector, frozen with fear, does nothing. Hector tries to fade into the shadows and drop off Joey's radar, but when a fight between Chavo and Hector's brother Fili escalates, Hector is left with no choice but to take a stand.

The violent confrontation takes Hector to places he never expected, including a reform school where he has to live side-by-side with Joey. It's up to Hector to choose whether he's going to lose himself to revenge or get back to the hard work of living.

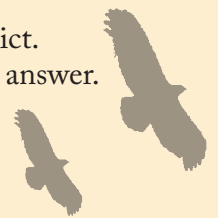
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. The novel begins with two of the main characters, Hector and Azi, opting for the longer route home from school, a route that is better for conversation. What is revealed to the reader about the connection between Hector and Azi in this opening scene?
2. Discuss how Hector's living circumstances influence the life goals and plans for the future that he shares with Azi. What personal qualities do you think are necessary to set meaningful life goals in challenging circumstances?
3. While the setting of the novel presents a sizable challenge for Hector, which characters introduced in the first chapter of the novel add to his difficulties? Compare and contrast how Hector and his difficult neighbor's behaviors and attitudes are influenced by the setting.
4. Historically, ranchers have devised brands to mark and identify their cattle in order to keep others from stealing their livestock. How is the scene between Joey and Hector on the loading dock of the grocery store reminiscent of past practices of branding? What do you think Joey intended to accomplish with his frightening actions on the loading dock?
5. A pivotal scene in the novel takes place after the Lion's Club luncheon where Hector and Azi are honored for their essay submissions on the pursuit of happiness. Describe Hector's feelings before and during the event and the factors, both internal and external, that influence his emotions at the luncheon.
6. The showdown between Fili and Chavo takes place in a church parking lot after the luncheon. What is the significance of this setting and of the vision Hector has of his father and brother after Hector is injured?
7. Hector meets Mrs. Encina, a social worker, at the hospital as he recovers from his injuries. What consequences does Hector face and what decision must he make about his future? How does Hector's interpretation of courage affect his decision?
8. How does Hector respond to his father's statement regarding a need to strike a balance? How does revenge become a part of Hector's response?
9. Azi represents the voice of reason when she visits Hector in the hospital and offers him advice about what actions he should take at his arraignment. Given how much Hector respects Azi and her friendship, why doesn't he follow her advice?

10. After the judge assigns both Hector and Joey to the Furman Academy, she shares that both boys are guilty of “similar delinquencies” though she deems Hector’s actions as the most offensive because Joey only knew violence as he was growing up. Do you agree or disagree with the judge’s assessment of the two crimes? Give reasons for your opinion.
11. Hector has set his mind on revenge and lets Joey know that he intends to kill him. Joey counters that Hector is still a coward. Discuss the shift in Hector’s character in terms of his behavior and emotions from the time of the banquet to the car ride with Joey to Furman.
12. Colonel Taylor interviews Joey and then Hector upon their arrival at Furman. He shares with Hector that he had already spoken with his teachers and others who could attest to Hector’s intelligence and promise. Colonel Taylor then says, “You’ll either be one of our best students or the worst. It’s up to you.” Joey’s interaction with Colonel Taylor is far less civil, begging the question: What makes a person good or bad? Discuss this idea through the lives of Joey and Hector. Cite examples from the text to illustrate your view.
13. Though Hector is smarter and a better basketball player than Joey, Joey still has the upper hand in their conflict. What does Joey whisper to Hector during their basketball game? How do Joey’s words reveal what lies beneath Hector’s anger and his feelings about revenge?
14. When Hector works with Joey and Sansón to dig up a septic tank, Hector is presented with a moral dilemma: Should he exact revenge or save a life? Describe what happens in this pivotal scene and discuss your reactions to Hector’s decision. In this situation, would you have made the same choice as Hector?
15. As part of his efforts help Sansón with his reading, Hector and Sansón talk about the Hemingway novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. Sansón notes that the struggle between Hector and Joey is analogous to the struggle between the old man and the tuna in the story—that like the old man and the fish, Joey and Hector are hooked together. Hector ponders the accuracy of this analogy and wonders if he is more like the old man being dragged to his death, or more like the hooked fish. What lesson is there for Hector to learn from this literary analogy?
16. Evaluate the ending of the story when Joey and Hector have a final reckoning with their conflict. Was the ending satisfying? Did it make the story more effective in your opinion? Explain your answer.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



1. Hector and Azi both write about “The Pursuit of Happiness” for a Lion’s Club essay competition. In their essays, both describe the challenges and hardships each of their fathers had to endure as they sought happiness and security for their families. How would you approach “The Pursuit of Happiness”? Write a short essay and share it with a partner.
2. Choose ten significant events from the novel. Make a timeline of the events and explain the impact of each event on the development of the themes in *On the Hook*.
3. Rewrite the church parking lot scene from Gloria or Joey’s perspectives.
4. When Hector meets with Cortina in prison, Cortina tells him, “It took me a long time to understand that it’s a lot easier to hate than it is to mourn.” Explore how this statement applies to Hector.
5. Rewrite a pivotal scene from the book as a script (for a movie, a play, or a graphic novel). Add notes and cues for setting, character development, sound effects, and diagrams or sketches where appropriate.

RESOURCES

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES HELPLINE <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

TEEN LINE: A TEEN-TO-TEEN HOTLINE <https://teenlineonline.org/talk-now/>

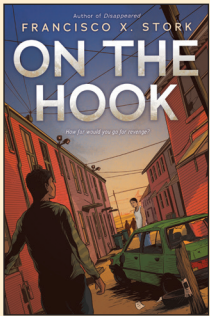
BULLYING VICTIMS INFORMATION AND HELPCHAT LINE <https://www.stompoutbullying.org/get-help>

TEEN ANGER MANAGEMENT TIPS <https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/deal-with-anger.html>

TEEN GRIEF RESOURCES <https://www.dougy.org/grief-support-resources/teens>

A TEENAGER’S GUIDE TO DEPRESSION <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/teenagers-guide-to-depression.htm>

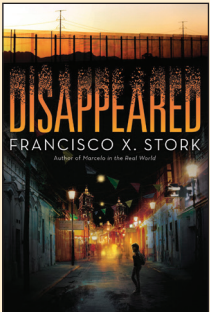
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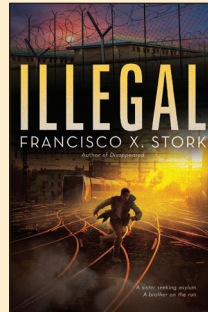
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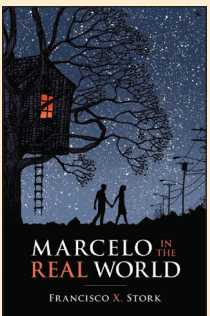
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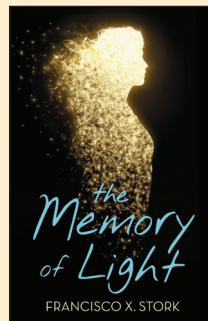


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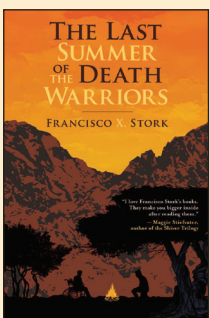


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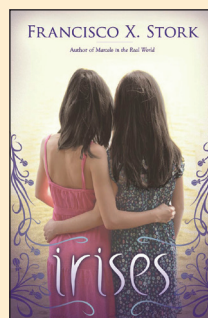


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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FRANCISCO X. STORK emigrated from Mexico at the age of nine with his mother and stepfather and spent his teenage years in El Paso, Texas. He is the author of eight novels including: *Marcelo in the Real World*, recipient of the Schneider Family Book Award, *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors*, which received the Elizabeth Walden Award, and *The Memory of Light*, recipient of the Tomás Rivera Award. His most recent novels are *Disappeared*, which received four starred reviews and was a Walter Dean Myers Award Honor Book, and its companion, *Illegal*. He lives near Boston with his family. Visit him at franciscostork.com.



PHOTO CREDIT: Anna Stork