



A Common Core State Anchor Standards-Aligned Educator Guide for Grades 7 - 12

ONE LAST CHANCE TO LIVE

About the book:

Publisher: Scholastic Press
ISBN-10: 1339010232
ISBN-13: 978-1339010236
Reading age: 12 and up
Grade level: 7-12

Nico, a high school senior with dreams of becoming a writer, is haunted by a vivid dream of his own funeral, where Rosario, his late love and muse, beckons to him. As Nico becomes obsessed with unraveling the mystery of her death, he faces the harsh realities of his own life—his sick mother, a brother entangled with a gang, and the overwhelming urge to let go. This poignant novel explores the search for meaning and creativity in a flawed, yet beautiful life.

- ★ *An affecting, deeply emotional story. An important book.* -- Booklist
- ★ *An illuminatingly powerful story about mental illness, young love, faith, and hope.* -- Kirkus Reviews
- ★ *This taut and suspensefully plotted emotional drama offers a nuanced, poignant story of friendship in the face of adversity.* -- The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

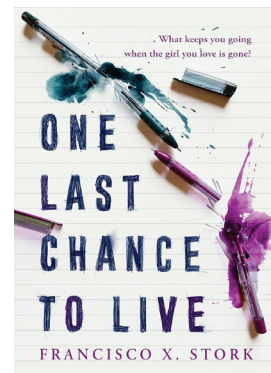
About the Author – Francisco X. Stork (he, him):

Francisco emigrated from Mexico at age nine with his mother and adoptive father. *I Am Not Alone* is his tenth novel. His other works include *Marcelo in the Real World* (Schneider Family Book Award), *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors* (Elizabeth Walden Award), *The Memory of Light* (Tomas Rivera Award), *Disappeared* (Young Adult Award from the Texas Institute of Letters, Walter Dean Myers Award Honor Book), and *Illegal* (In the Margins Award, International Latino Book Award). His 2021 novel *On the Hook* received four starred reviews and the International Latino Book Award.



Pre-reading Discussion:

- Examine the artwork features on the cover of the book. Identify the element that catches your eye. Predict how this element might be important to the story.
- Consider how the title and the main image on the cover might relate to each other. Predict how these clues relate to the plot or themes of the book.
- What do the images or notebook paper, broken pens, and splattered ink depicted on the cover suggest about the story's themes, setting, and characters. How might these elements influence the events of the novel?
- Based on the colors, lighting, and overall design of the cover, what kind of mood or tone do you expect from the story? Do you think it will be suspenseful, hopeful, mysterious, etc.? Explain your answer.
- Predict what ONE LAST CHANCE TO LIVE is going to be about.



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Post-Reading Discussion:

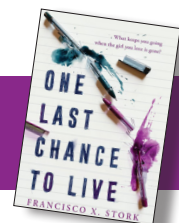
"Well, I suppose if you want to be a writer, a journal can be a training ground for writing a novel. But composing with an eye to be read may keep you from attaining one of the benefits of a journal – the self knowledge it gives you" (pg 18).

"The addiction starts small," Noah said. His tone was of one speaking from experience. "You don't want to start down that road. Trust me. All we want to do is nip it in the bud" (pg. 93).

As I walk to the elevator, I felt the kind of loneliness you feel when you have a chance to be close to someone, but you choose to stay distant (pg. 153).

"They grow up missing something, with an emptiness they try to fill in different ways – Ways that are never enough or even that good" (pg. 205).

- Nico's meeting with Mr. Cortazar is driven by his need to understand Rosario's death. He questions what Mr. Cortazar knew about her emotional state, what he said to her, and whether he might have influenced her decision. Analyze the role of suspicion in shaping Nico's perception of Mr. Cortazar and his relationship to Rosario.
- When asked why Nico writes, he reflects that "...writing kept loneliness at a safe distance (pg. 22)." Do you think writing served the same purpose for Rosario? Explain your answer.
- Describe your impression of Mr. Cortazar. Predict what role he might play in the story, and explain your reasoning.
- Define the term *addiction*. What does the word mean to you?
- In this scene, Noah stated that "...addiction starts small." Do you agree with his statement? Why or why not?
- Examine how the grip of addiction has shaped Nico, Noah, and Alma's lives. Identify how addiction has shaped the decisions they have made and contributed to their struggles before and after Rosario's death.
- *Irony* involves contradiction, discrepancy, and absurdity. Explain why Noah's warning to Nico about the dangers of addiction is ironic, and explore the irony in Nico's dismissal of that warning.
- Consider reasons why, in this scene, Nico resisted telling Ruth that he thought that they could be friends.
- The word *honest* is defined as being truthful, sincere, genuine, and upfront. Explain what the term *honest writing* means (pg. 150). Is Nico's writing an honest reflection of his life? How so?
- Explore the irony of Nico and Ruth talking about honesty while Nico has been passing off her writing as his own.
- Explore the similarities and differences between Ruth and Rosario, and delve into how Nico's choice to stay distant from Ruth, while grieving Rosario, intensifies his loneliness.
- Examine what it means to feel empty. Discuss how this feeling can manifest in various forms, such as a lack of love, focus, or hope.
- Determine how the feeling of emptiness affects Javier, Alma, Sabrina, Noah, Rosario, Nico, and even Primo. Identify how each character tries to fill the void they experience.
- Think about how Nico's starting to see he's becoming just like his father, and with his mom dying, he's suddenly responsible for Javier. Consider how this is a make-or-break moment for Nico—will he change course or keep repeating the same mistakes?
- Could the statement made by Rosario in this scene had been a call for help? If so, Is there something Nico could have done differently that may have saved Rosario's life? Explain your answer.



"I love her."

"Better. What else?"

"I thought...she...maybe loved me."

"Maybe she did, bro. Could be she did."

Silence (pg. 278).

- The term *unrequited love* is when a person is deeply in love with someone, but they do not feel that same way. It's like giving all your feelings to someone who doesn't give them back. Make a connection between the notion of unrequited love and Rosario's relationships with Noah and Nico.
- Consider how Rosario's struggle to express love pushed her toward heroin, a desperate escape that ultimately led to her death. Could it be that her unspoken emotions became the chains that bound her to a tragic end?
- Could Nico's quest to uncover the truth about Rosario's death have saved him from a similar fate? In trying to understand Rosario's tragedy, did Nico learn something that protected him from the same end? Explain your answer.

Reflective Journaling Exercise:

Character Journal Entries:

Have students choose key moments in the story where a character of their choice faces a significant decision or challenge. Ask them to write a journal entry as if they were that character, reflecting on their thoughts, emotions, and the possible outcomes of their choices.

Self-Knowledge Exploration:

Encourage students to delve into the concept of self-knowledge in their entries by asking questions like, "What is the character discovering about themselves in this moment?" or "What insights or realizations is the character gaining, and how did these insights shape their actions moving forward?"

Personal Connection:

After writing from the character's perspective, instruct students to write a second journal entry where they reflect on a similar situation in their own lives or consider how they might have responded in the character's place.

Discussion and Sharing:

Encourage students to examine varied interpretations of the novel's themes and characterization by sharing and discussing their journal entries and reflections with the class.

Culminating Reflection:

As a final step, students can compile their journal entries and analyses into a reflective essay or multimedia project, articulating how the novel's themes have influenced their own journey of self-discovery.

