

**STUDY QUESTIONS for**  
***PARROT IN THE OVEN***  
**by Victor Martinez**

Be prepared to answer three of the following questions in well-developed paragraphs at the conclusion of reading the book:

1. Reviewed as a "brilliant, witty memoir of a Mexican-American adolescence" (U. S. News and World Report), *Parrot in the Oven* is clearly a story highly influenced by the race and culture of its protagonist. But the crises and problems that Manny experiences - love, violence, sibling conflicts, gangs - are universal obstacles in teenage life. How do Manny's experiences speak to readers of all genders, races and socioeconomic levels? How is Manny's story specific to the Hispanic-American barrio life that the author introduces? Are there certain experiences that are more applicable to urban communities? To males?

2. In Chapter 4, "The Bullet," we discover the meaning of the book's title. Is *el perioco* an accurate description of Manny? Is it ironic\* that Manny's father calls him this? In what ways is Manny trusting or not trusting? How does Manny become wiser in the course of the novel? What light does the title's significance shed on Manny's relationship with his father and on his father's personality?

\*unexpected in a dry, humorous way

3. Readers of *Parrot in the Oven* plunge into Manny's world through a series of chapter-length vignettes, each detailing a specific episode in Manny's critical fourteenth year of life. Before he wrote *Parrot in the Oven*, Victor Martinez was primarily a short-story writer and poet. Do you think that the format of this novel is influenced by Martinez's work as a poet? Can the vignettes be appreciated as separate entities? What links each episode to the others in the novel?

4. Overflowing with figurative language, *Parrot in the Oven* is a "whirlwind of surprising similes and inventive turns of phrase"(Kirkus reviews). How does Martinez's rich language make Manny's story more poignant\*? Did the language enrich your reading of this novel? What are

some of the most memorable metaphors, similes, and images in the novel? Do you notice any recurring metaphors?

\*deeply affecting or touching

5. Are you surprised by Mr. Hernandez's compassion at the conclusion of the "Family Affair" chapter, which details Magda's miscarriage"? Why or why not? Do you think that Mrs. Hernandez and Manny's worry was necessary?

6. Throughout the novel, we get to know Nardo as Manny's strong older brother who knows how to have a good time, but doesn't necessarily know how to hold down a job. Manny and Nardo are clearly different, and Manny occasionally points these instances out. But how are Manny and Nardo alike? And what specifically is so different about the brothers? Is each of the brothers more like one of their parents?

7. Several of the characters in *Parrot in the Oven* idealize specific material possessions. Manny wants a baseball glove "so bad a sweet hurt blossomed in his stomach whenever he thought about it" (p. 7). Magda "lived and breathed to caress her records" (p. 90). Mother has her movies and statues, and Father has his rifle. Why do the characters value these possessions? Is there any common characteristic among these desired items? Can you think of any other items that characters seek in this novel?

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