

Solimar

THE SWORD OF THE MONARCHS

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Disney • HYPERION



ABOUT THE BOOK

On the brink of her quinceañera, and her official coronation, Solimar visits the oyamel forest to sit among the monarch butterflies. There, the sun pierces through a sword-shaped crevice in a boulder, which shines on her and sends the butterflies humming and swirling around her. After the magical frenzy, she realizes she's been given a gift—and a burden: she can predict the near future! She has also become a protector of the young and weak butterflies.

This alone would be a huge responsibility, but tragedy strikes when a neighboring king invades while her father and brother and many others are away. The remaining villagers are taken hostage—all except Solimar. Can this princess-to-be save her family, the kingdom, and the future of the monarch butterflies from a greedy and dangerous king?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pam Muñoz Ryan is a *New York Times* bestselling author and US nominee for the international Hans Christian Andersen Award. She has written over forty books, including *Esperanza Rising*, *Becoming Naomi León*, *Riding Freedom*, *Paint the Wind*, *The Dreamer*, and *Echo*, a Newbery Honor book and the recipient of the Kirkus Prize. She is the author recipient of the National Education Association's Human and Civil Rights Award and the Virginia Hamilton Literary Award for Multicultural Literature, and twice the recipient of the Pura Belpré Medal and the Willa Cather Award. Other honors include the PEN USA Award, the Américas Award, the Boston Globe–Horn Book Honor, and the Orbis Pictus Award. She was born and raised in Bakersfield, California, but now lives near San Diego with her family. Many of her stories reflect her half-Mexican heritage.

AS-YOU-READ ACTIVITIES

1. Have students keep track of questions they have about monarch butterflies using the Getting to Know Monarch Butterflies handout on page 6 of this guide for a post-reading research project.
2. Print the Character Traits of a Royal Family Venn diagram on page 7 of this guide. As you read the book, list the character traits of King Sebastián, Campeón, and Solimar.
3. Print the map of San Gregorio on page 8 in this guide in order to follow Solimar and Berto's trip to Puerto Rivera.
4. Use the geographical clues in the book and monarch butterfly flight migration maps found online to try to pinpoint where San Gregorio is located in modern-day Mexico.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR WRITING

1. In Chapter 1, Solimar wishes she knew what would come next in her life: "Imagine always knowing in your heart which way to turn and what life has in store for you around the corner" (p. 5). Do you believe it would be better to be prepared, to know everything that will happen to you in advance, or to be surprised? What are the pros and cons to each of these, to knowing and not knowing?
2. Solimar keeps her hair short, prefers to wear boots instead of shoes, and enjoys exploring in the forest. She also could not care less about her upcoming quinceañera. As a result, she and her grandmother have a disagreement in Chapter 2 as to how a princess should look and behave, and each of them believes they are in the right. Is there a correct answer to their debate? Explain.
3. Solimar is resentful that she will never be in line to the throne and forever remain in the shadow of her brother. Describe a moment in your life where you felt like you were being overshadowed by a sister, a brother, a cousin, or another relative. How did you resolve the conflict? How did the resolution make it better or make it worse?
4. In Chapters 3 and 4, Solimar connects her ability to see the immediate future to the mystical encounter she had with the monarch butterflies as the young monarchs embedded themselves in her rebozo. What possible dangers might Solimar encounter if people were to discover that she possesses this rare gift?
5. Though Solimar's foresight about Campeón is correct, she finds his decision not to return from the expedition incomprehensible. What realization does Solimar come to about Campeón and his responsibilities to the kingdom? How does Campeón's decision make Solimar feel about her own abilities?
6. In Chapter 8, Doña Flor explains to Solimar how the rebozo became enchanted. Though anyone might have been chosen to carry the rebozo, why do you believe the monarch butterflies chose Solimar as the "benevolent courier" of the rebozo?

7. Though Lázaro and Zarita are not human, each are unique and important characters. In what ways would Solimar's story have been different without Lázaro as a character in the book? In what ways would Solimar's story have been different without Zarita?
8. Solimar is gripped by fear, unsure if she could successfully navigate Río Diablo. The vest Doña Flor gave her may make her unsinkable but not unbreakable. Is instinct enough to help Solimar survive the treacherous river? Describe a challenge that you have experienced in which you had the skill to succeed but had to rely on your instincts to ensure your success.
9. Life sometimes requires that we rely on people we do not know, to blindly trust another person to solve a problem. Both Berto and Solimar each have the fate of their families in their hands and must form a genuine alliance to save their loved ones. In what ways did Solimar give in to blindly trust Berto so that she could save her family? How did Berto blindly trust Solimar to save his family?
10. In Chapter 16, several events take place that help Solimar overcome her doubts and fears about getting to Puerto Rivera on Río Diablo. List three of these events and describe how each helped her to ultimately succeed in her task.
11. Rigoberto Ayala Bernal, "Berto" for short, believes "Dreams are never for nothing" (p. 123) and that "Obstacles make life more interesting" (p. 127). Dreams can sometimes keep us from accomplishing our goals when we focus only on our dreams. How does Berto successfully mesh being a dreamer and a doer?
12. Teamwork is frequently used to accomplish goals that we might not accomplish individually. How did Berto and Solimar utilize teamwork to navigate on a journey of no return through the labyrinth of caves?
13. Imagine that you are called upon to defend Campeón in a courtroom against charges of abandoning his family and his kingdom and returning only because he had no other option. What are your arguments to defend Campeón and to justify that he is, in fact, a hero?
14. In Chapter 22, Solimar's father acknowledges her true bravery and her ingenuity. Do you believe that her father's acknowledgment will change Solimar's future? Defend your answer.
15. We know from the book that the monarch butterflies would detach from Solimar's rebozo when they were strong enough. In your view, what was symbolic of the departure of the last monarch butterfly?
16. People often find that events cause them to act in ways they never imagined. In the first chapter of the book, Solimar gives herself permission to be courageous. Explain the arc of her courage between the start and the end of the book. How did Solimar's internal and external struggles shape her courage?
17. Think back to the beginning of the book and through its magical end. What did Solimar ultimately discover?

POST-READING AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

RESEARCH PROJECT: GETTING TO KNOW MONARCH BUTTERFLIES

1. Either with a partner or in a group, have students share the questions they have about monarch butterflies, and choose the best questions to research.
2. Have students divide up the research questions among themselves, and then conduct print and online research to compile the answers to the questions, making sure to cite sources.
3. Have students reconvene with their partner or group to discuss what they discovered in their research, focusing on what they learned, and what they found interesting or surprising.
4. Have groups create a presentation showcasing what they have learned about monarch butterflies to present to the class. The presentation can be fun and interactive, and should include print, online, and video resources.

SHORT ESSAY: THE COURAGE TO LEAD

Review the character traits of King Sebastián, Solimar, and Campeón and write a short essay endorsing either Solimar or Campeón to lead San Gregorio when King Sebastián steps down. Support your endorsement with examples from the book.

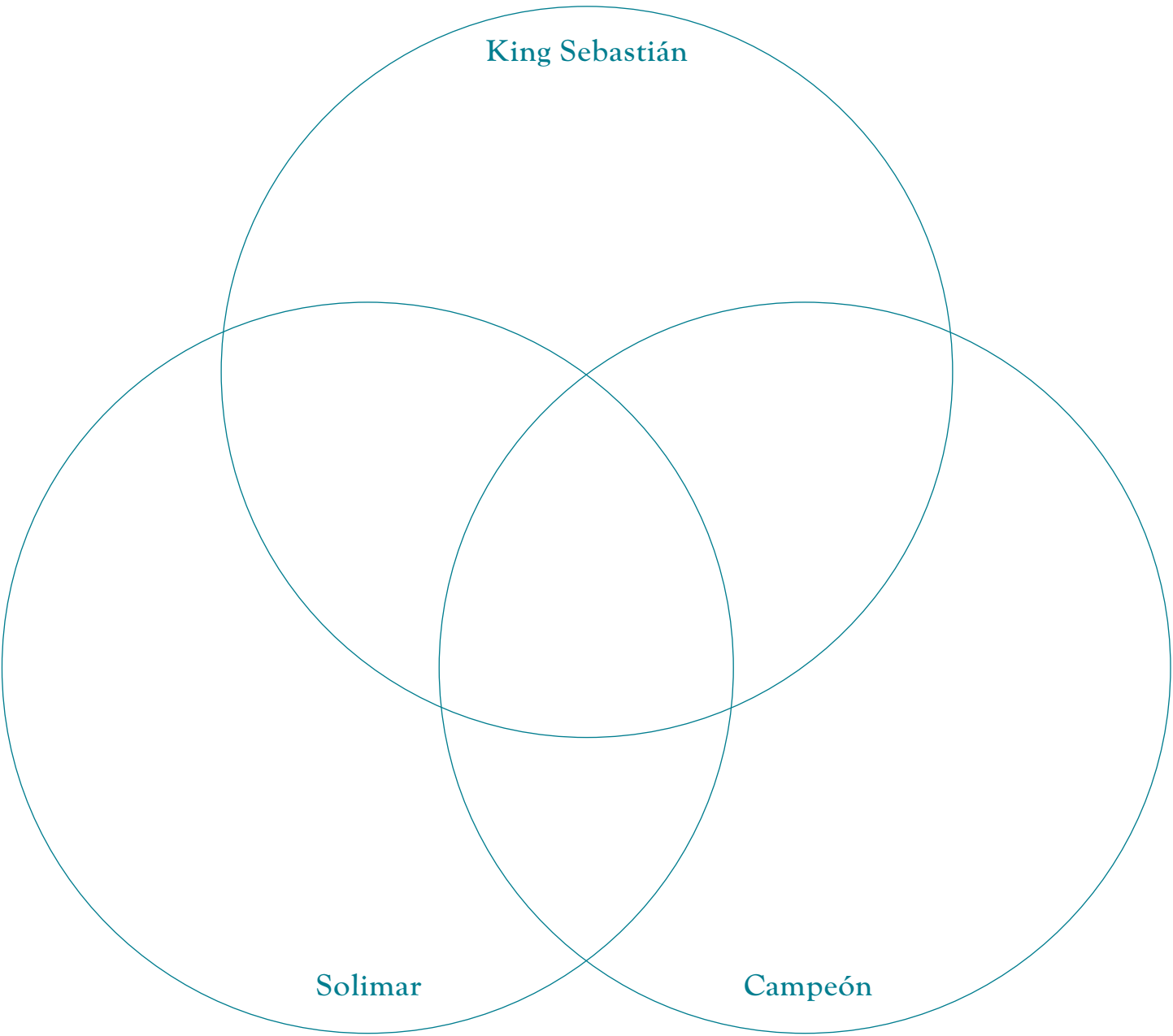
GETTING TO KNOW MONARCH BUTTERFLIES

As you read through *Solimar*, list any questions you have about monarch butterflies. After you read the book, you will return to answer the questions in a post-reading activity. Make sure to cite the sources where you learned the answers to your questions.

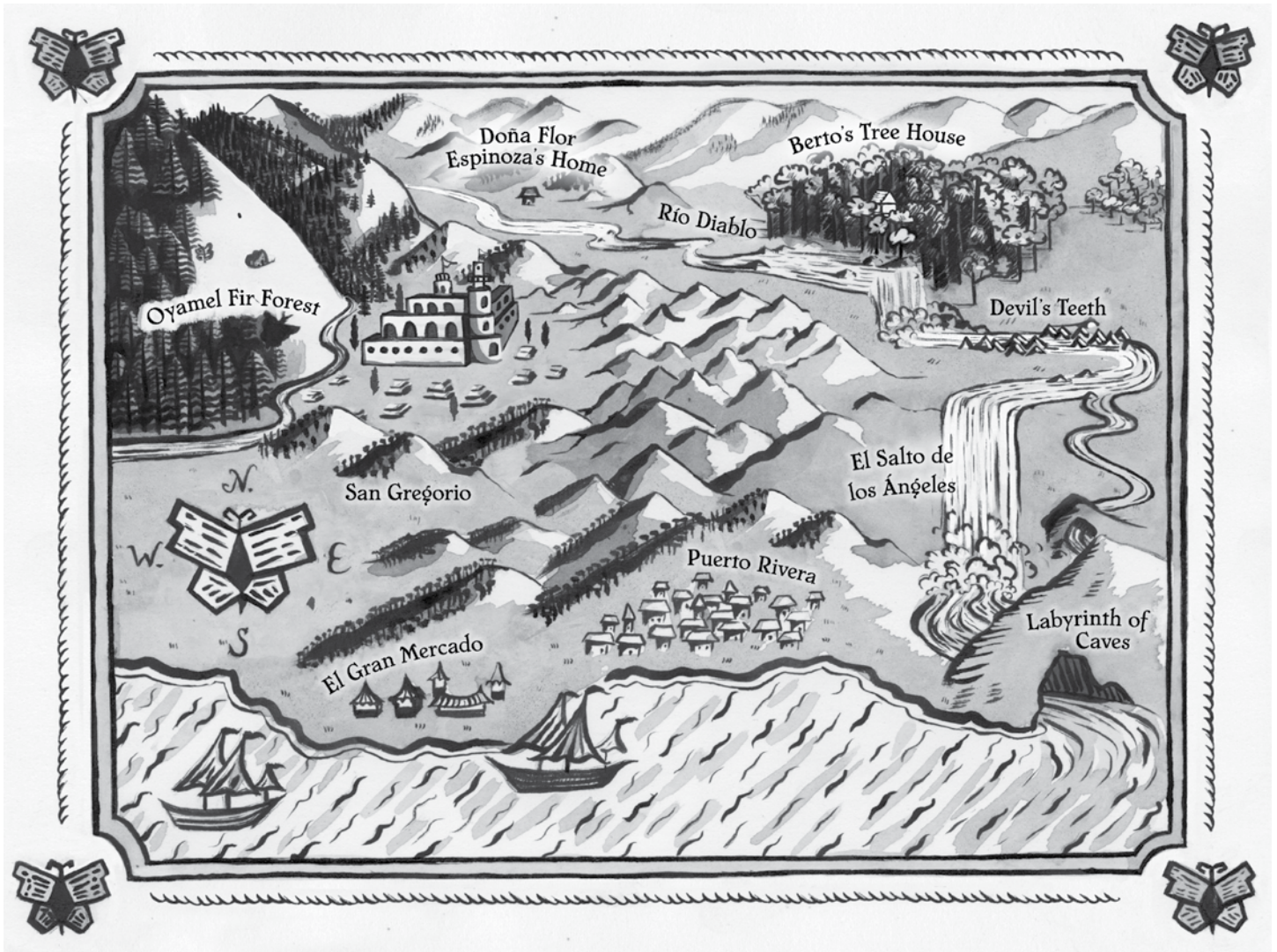
Question	Answer	Source

CHARACTER TRAITS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY

Directions: Use this Venn diagram to help you compare the character traits of King Sebastián, Solimar, and Campeón. Where the circles overlap, write down how the characters are alike (between two or all three, depending on how the circles overlap). In the places where the circles do not overlap, write down the traits that are unique to each character.



MAP OF SAN GREGORIO



Q & A WITH PAM MUÑOZ RYAN ABOUT *SOLIMAR*

Q: In an [AdLit video interview](#), you talk about your grandmother who led a sort of princess life in Mexico before coming to the United States. Is your grandmother's story perhaps the seedling for *Solimar: The Sword of the Monarchs*, and if so, how?

A: I didn't intend for my grandmother's story to be a seedling for *Solimar*. At least, not consciously. But so much of writing is unconscious. When I was asked to create a Latina princess story for Disney, I embraced the idea of developing an original character. In my book *Esperanza Rising*, which parallels my grandmother's immigration story, I wrote a reverse Cinderella story—a story about a girl who is raised wealthy and is a princess of sorts, yet her family's situation changes and she becomes a farmworker. In *Solimar*, my character is born into royalty and remains royalty but desperately wants to have a say in the antiquated monarchy to which she was born. Both stories are about feeling powerless and wanting societal change in unique and challenging situations. I have always wondered how *Esperanza's* story would have evolved had her circumstances been different. Maybe she would have been more like *Solimar*.

Q: Tell us how you developed the idea of weaving the monarch butterflies into the story and into *Solimar's* rebozo.

A: As I researched settings, I was drawn to the oyamel forests and the monarch butterfly migration to Central Mexico. I grew up in Southern California, where I often visited the Central Coast, one of the monarch butterfly overwintering sites. The monarch migration is remarkable: Their importance to the natural world is profound, and there are myths and legends about the monarchs that many cultures hold close to their hearts. In *Solimar's* fictional village, people believe that the ancestors of monarch butterflies inhabit the oyamel forest. Butterflies do need the warmth of the sun to survive, and I wanted *Solimar* to be invested in their survival. I knew early in the writing that one of her goals would be to protect the oyamel forest and in turn, the butterflies. But I also wanted a method in which the butterflies could shadow her on her journey. I created the magic rebozo with the embedded butterflies, so that her mission is twofold—to save the monarchs and her kingdom.

Q: Even though *Solimar* gives herself permission to be courageous in the book, you challenged her courage with an incredible amount of obstacles. Explain why you thought it so important to make her, more than any other character, struggle. Are *Solimar's* struggles in any way a commentary on struggles that women face in our society?

A: *Solimar* wants to be king and have a voice. But she doesn't really have a grasp on the difficulty of what it means to rule a kingdom. When she must save her kingdom, she must cope with many precarious situations. Sometimes she steps up and persists. Sometimes she seeks help. Other times, she doubts herself and falters a little. She evolves and has a better understanding of what it might mean to lead. In the end, her perseverance makes her worthy of the role that is bestowed upon her.

Q: Tell us about Solimar's inner strengths.

A: Solimar is curious and observant, and when she sees injustice, she speaks up. For example, she wants equality for women in the kingdom—to vote, to travel, to be their own advocates—and she makes great strides toward this.

Q: How did Lázaro, a quetzal bird, and Zarita, a rag doll, become such fun and essential characters in the book?

A: I knew that I'd be sending Solimar on a journey down a perilous river by herself. I wanted her to have a pet confidante. At first, I tried the chachalaca, which is a pheasant-like bird and quite raucous, but it didn't quite work on several levels. I came upon the resplendent quetzal, and it fit. It is colorful, unusual—the male has a three-foot-long tail—and revered. Lázaro was conceived and became the wise voice of reason, reminding Solimar of the rules and cautioning against danger. Then came Zarita. I've had muñecas de trapo, rag dolls from Mexico, in my office for years. They're bright and cheerful with ribbon-looped hair. Zarita became Lázaro's counterpart, providing a different voice—one of unabashed enthusiasm and daring. ■



This guide was written by **MARIBEL CASTRO**, a former school and academic librarian, currently serving as the director of technology and information services at Louise S. McGehee School in New Orleans, Louisiana. Castro has served on several reading list committees, served as president of the Texas Library Association and was a member of the executive board of the American Association of School Librarians. She is the child of migrant workers from Mexico who did not have much in terms of wealth, but got her a library card, opening up a rich world of words and thoughts. Castro believes that children of diverse backgrounds deserve to be reflected in the pages of the books they read.

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