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Lesson One

FOCUS: Biography

Examining an author’s life can inform and expand the reader’s understanding of a novel. Biographical criticism is the practice of analyzing a literary work through the lens of an author’s experience. In this lesson, explore the author’s life to understand the novel more fully.

Traces of Julia Alvarez’s life abound in all her novels, poems, and nonfiction books. Although *In the Time of the Butterflies* is a work of historical fiction about the Mirabal sisters, it relates to Alvarez’s own life. With her parents and sisters, Alvarez fled the Dominican Republic in 1960 when she was ten years old, after authorities discovered that Alvarez’s father belonged to an underground effort to overthrow Trujillo’s regime. The military intelligence service had previously put Alvarez’s grandfather in prison for two days, where, although he was not tortured, he was “‘persuaded’ to sell a part of his land for the minimum price to the daughter of the dictator.” Fearing for their safety, the Alvarezes fled to the United States. Just three months later, Patria, Minerva, and María Teresa Mirabal—founders of the same underground movement Alvarez’s father had left—were murdered off a lonely mountain road.

Discussion Activities

Have students keep reader’s journals. They should record an entry for each reading assignment. In class, listen to The Big Read Audio Guide. Have students take notes in their journals as they listen. Ask them to present three important points learned from listening to the guide.

Ask students to read the following essays from the Reader’s Guide: “Introduction to the Novel,” “Julia Alvarez,” and “An Interview with Julia Alvarez.” Divide the class into groups. Each group will present a summary of the main points in its assigned essay.

Writing Exercise

Julia Alvarez has called herself an “all-American writer,” referring to both Americas, and “a Vermont writer from the Dominican Republic.” Ask your students to name their own writing style. In this voice, have students write a brief essay or short story about a place from their childhood. Remind them to use evocative language that appeals to the reader’s senses and their voice as a certain kind of writer.

Homework

Distribute Handout One: *In the Time of the Butterflies* as a Work of Historical Fiction and “The Dominican Republic and Hispaniola” from the Reader’s Guide. Ask students to read both essays and Chapters One and Two from the novel. Prepare students to read thirty to forty pages each night in order to complete reading this book in nine lessons.

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Lesson Two

FOCUS: Culture and History

Cultural and historical contexts give birth to the dilemmas and themes at the center of the novel. Studying these contexts and appreciating intricate details of the time and place help readers understand the motivations of the characters.

The novel is set in the Dominican Republic, primarily from 1938 to 1960, when the country struggled under the brutal dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. The novel often gives a sense of the close-knit community of the Mirabal family. The use of Spanish words and phrases helps American readers further appreciate the setting and culture. Alvarez lived in the Dominican Republic until she was ten years old. She has written, “The power of stories was all around me, for the tradition of storytelling is deeply rooted in my Dominican culture. With over eighty percent illiteracy when I was growing up, the culture was still an oral culture. Rarely did I see anyone reading a book.”

Discussion Activities

Discuss Handout One: *In the Time of the Butterflies* as a Work of Historical Fiction. Ask students if they feel that “truth according to character” can substitute for factual information within a novel. Can truth vary based on who is telling the story? Is there a difference between emotional truth and historical fact? If they were studying this part of Dominican history in a social studies class, which would they be concerned with? What benefits can be gained by reading about historical events through the lens of a novel?

The setting of *In the Time of the Butterflies* is remote from us in both time and place. Ask your students to characterize, and respond to, the world that Alvarez creates. Amid the remoteness and the exoticism, are there any elements of the situation that touch them in a real and immediate way?

Have students provide a factual description of family culture thus far in the novel. What values are emerging?

Writing Exercise

In their journals, ask your students to write three paragraphs considering why Alvarez might have chosen to begin the novel by introducing the reader to Dedé Mirabal and then move back in time. How is the Mirabal family described? How might knowing that three of the sisters will die detract from or add to the novel’s narrative arc?

Homework

Read Chapters Three and Four. Students will now have read one chapter from each of the voices of four Mirabal sisters, Dedé, Minerva, María Teresa, and Patria. Ask the class to think about the ways Dedé differs from her three sisters, as well as any qualities that they might have in common.

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Lesson Three

FOCUS: Narrative and Point of View

The narrator tells the story, with a specific perspective informed by his or her beliefs and experiences. Narrators can be major or minor characters, or exist outside the story altogether. The narrator weaves her or his point of view, including ignorance and bias, into telling the tale. A first-person narrator participates in the events of the novel, using “I.” A distanced narrator, often not a character, is removed from the action of the story and uses the third person (he, she, and they). The distanced narrator may be omniscient, able to read the minds of all the characters, or limited, describing only certain characters’ thoughts and feelings. Ultimately, the type of narrator determines the point of view from which the story is told.

In the Time of the Butterflies has twelve chapters that span from 1938 to 1994. We receive detailed descriptions and learn both the spoken and unspoken thoughts of all four major characters directly, as most of these chapters are from a first-person point of view. The first chapter and the epilogue take place many years after the bulk of the novel’s action and serve as a framing device. Like Julia Alvarez, the writer/reporter is a *gringa dominicana* who visits the Dominican Republic to learn the truth about the Mirabals’ tragic history. Alvarez has said that writing the novel allowed her to understand Trujillo’s dictatorship from a woman’s point of view. Readers also see how the past informs the future and the irony that Dedé’s survival drives her to tell the story of her sisters’ deaths.

Discussion Activities

Discuss Alvarez’s choice to write the novel from multiple points of view. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this choice? Why might Alvarez have chosen to write María Teresa’s chapters in epistolary form—that is, in the form of a letter or diary? What are the advantages or disadvantages of the first-person, third-person, and epistolary points of view? Ask your students if they prefer one form over the others.

Discuss the difference in each sister’s voice. Is Alvarez successful in making each sister distinct? If so, how does she achieve this effect?

Writing Exercise

Ask the class to write a description of a personal experience in their reader’s journals. The students may choose to write in a straightforward first-person narrative, in epistolary form, or to describe their experience from a third-person point of view. Read some of the essays from each perspective, ask the authors why they chose that method, and solicit class reaction to the different techniques.

Homework

Read Chapters Five and Six. Ask students to write one paragraph in their journals about each sister’s personality and interests. Is there one sister who may be considered the “main character” of the novel? Why or why not?

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Lesson Four

FOCUS: Characters

The central character in a work of literature is called the “protagonist.” The protagonist usually initiates the main action of the story and often overcomes a flaw such as weakness or ignorance to achieve a new understanding by the work’s end. A protagonist who acts with great honor or courage may be called a “hero.” An “antihero” is a protagonist lacking these qualities. Instead of being dignified, brave, idealistic, or purposeful, the antihero may be cowardly, self-interested, or weak. The protagonist’s journey is enriched by encounters with characters that hold differing beliefs. One such character type, a “foil,” has traits that contrast with the protagonist’s and highlight important features of the main character’s personality. The most important foil, the “antagonist,” opposes the protagonist, barring or complicating his or her success.

In the Time of the Butterflies is the story of both a family and a nation. Unable to tolerate the abuses of Trujillo’s regime, each of the Mirabal sisters becomes increasingly drawn toward political activism. Considering the circumstances that ultimately move each sister toward rebellion against a corrupt government, the reader begins to understand the abuses Dominicans suffered. Confronted by a classmate whose family suffered Trujillo’s wrath, Minerva becomes politically active while still in high school. Patria, María Teresa, and Dedé gain awareness more slowly, and struggle with the consequences of opposing the dictator’s regime.



Discussion Activities and Writing Exercise



Divide the class into four groups. Assign each group one of the four Mirabal sisters. Have each group produce a written report that analyzes the personal strengths and weaknesses of its assigned character, and discusses the ways that character helps to illuminate the novel’s larger thematic values. Ask students to read the reports aloud and discuss them as a class. Students should take notes in their reader’s journals during each group’s presentation.

Distribute Teacher’s Guide Handout Two: Traditional Roles of Women in the Dominican Republic. Minerva Mirabal learns of her father’s infidelity in Chapter Six. As a class, read this scene aloud. What do we learn about Minerva Mirabal in this short scene? Why does she tell her father that her kindness toward his mistress and children are “things a woman does”? Does understanding the traditional roles of women in the Dominican Republic make it more shocking when Minerva slaps Trujillo? Why or why not? How does the author use such scenes to help us understand the depth of a character?



Homework

Read Chapter Seven. Ask students to find three examples of figurative language in the chapters they have read so far and be prepared to discuss them at the next class.

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Lesson Five

FOCUS: Figurative Language

Writers use figurative language such as imagery, similes, and metaphors to help the reader visualize and experience events and emotions in a story. Imagery—a word or phrase that refers to sensory experience (sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste)—helps create a physical experience for the reader and adds immediacy to literary language.

Some figurative language asks us to stretch our imaginations, finding the likeness in seemingly unrelated things. Simile is a comparison of two things that initially seem quite different but are shown to have significant resemblance. Similes employ connective words, usually “like,” “as,” “than,” or a verb such as “resembles.” A metaphor is a statement that one thing is something else that, in a literal sense, it is not. By asserting that a thing is something else, a metaphor creates a close association that underscores an important similarity between those two things.

Alvarez’s talent as a poet is evident throughout her fiction, especially in *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Stylistically, the voices Alvarez has created for Dedé and Minerva more consistently use vivid images and vibrant similes than those of María Teresa or Patria. Still, figurative language appears on almost every page.

Discussion Activities

Similes are particularly prevalent throughout the novel. For instance: “But without a plan Dedé’s courage unraveled like a row of stitches not finished with a good, sturdy knot,” or when María Teresa says in Chapter Seven, “There were hundreds of us, the women all together, in white dresses like we were his brides, with white gloves and any kind of hat we wanted.” Ask students to share other examples of figurative language. After discussing several quotations, ask the class to consider how the use of figurative language helps readers imagine the world of the novel.

Writing Exercise

Figurative language can illuminate a complex idea or emotion, as when Dedé describes her struggle to join her sister or obey her husband at the end of Chapter Six. Ask students to remember a situation when they experienced strong or mixed feelings that seemed difficult to put into words and write a paragraph about that situation, using figurative language to describe their feelings.

Homework

Distribute Handout Three: The Fourteenth of June Movement and November 25th. Read Chapters Eight and Nine. Have students page through the book to find examples of objects that could be considered symbolic and note them in their journals.

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Lesson Six

FOCUS: Symbols

Symbols are persons, places, or things in a narrative that have significance beyond a literal understanding. The craft of storytelling depends on symbols to present ideas and point toward new meanings. Most frequently, a specific object will be used to refer to (or symbolize) a more abstract concept. The repeated appearance of an object suggests a non-literal, or figurative, meaning attached to the object. Symbols are often found in the book's title, at the beginning and end of the story, within a profound action, or in the name or personality of a character. The life of a novel is perpetuated by generations of readers interpreting and re-interpreting the main symbols. By identifying and understanding symbols, readers can reveal new interpretations of the novel.

Many of the novel's symbols become richer as the story progresses. Minerva herself is a symbol. By coincidence, her name alludes to the goddess of wisdom and she pursues her studies with vehemence uncommon among Dominican women of the 1950s. When Minerva asks Trujillo if she can study law at the university, he replies, "I could see our national treasure then on a regular basis. Perhaps, I could conquer this jewel as El Conquistador conquered our island." Of course, the irony in the dictator's comment is that Minerva does become a national treasure and, in effect, her steadfast commitment to democracy overcomes his government's corruption and abuse. After their deaths, Minerva and her sisters became international symbols of freedom and women's rights and are regarded as martyrs in the Dominican Republic.



Discussion Activities and Writing Exercise



Most students will be able to identify butterflies as an important symbol of the novel. Ask your students to write a three-paragraph essay discussing why butterflies are a fitting symbol for the Mirabal sisters.

As a class, discuss the ways Minerva functions as a symbol both as a character in this novel and in real life. Encourage students to think of other symbolic objects, characters, or events. (Some other examples are: the anacahuita tree from the Mirabal sisters' childhood, Dedé's ring, or her failure to plant seeds.) How is symbolic meaning different from literal value? How does the symbol inform our understanding of the story or character?



Homework

Read Chapter Ten.

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Lesson Seven

FOCUS: Character Development

Stories, novellas, and novels trace the development of the characters that encounter a series of challenges. Most characters contain a complex balance of virtues and vices. Internal and external forces require characters to question themselves, overcome fears, or reconsider dreams. The protagonist undergoes profound change. A close study of character development maps the evolution of motivation, personality, and belief in each character. Still, the tension between a character's strengths and weaknesses keeps the reader guessing about what might happen next, affecting the drama and the plot.

One might be tempted to call Minerva Mirabal the protagonist of the novel, but without the support of her husband and sisters, none of them would have been able to organize the underground movement, and probably none would have suffered house arrest, imprisonment, or death. This is one way Alvarez complicates the dynamics of character interaction in this novel, as the four sisters unite or rebel throughout their lives according to their own personalities and desires. Clearly, Rafael Trujillo functions as the antagonist, along with the men who follow his commands. Ironically, although Dedé remains silent during her sisters' rebellion against "El Jefe," she keeps the Mirabal family alive decades after her sisters' murders and helps raise their orphaned children.

Discussion Activities

Divide your class into four groups. Assign each group one of the Mirabal sisters, but ask students to join a group that focuses on a different sister than the one they analyzed during Lesson Four. Have them develop a timeline of the most important events in that character's narrative and write a short description of the way she has evolved. Have each group present their findings. Does one sister change more than the others? Which one most resists change?

Writing Exercise

Ask your students to write a short essay examining the following: Can small actions be considered heroic? Are there opportunities for heroism in day-to-day life? Do they know anyone they would consider a hero? If so, do they possess any of the same qualities as the Mirabal sisters?

Homework

Read Chapter Eleven. Have students page through the book and identify three major turning points.

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Lesson Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

The author artfully builds a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and inform character development. The timing of events from beginning to middle to end can make a book predictable or riveting. A plot, propelled by a crisis, will reach a climax, and close with a resolution (sometimes called denouement). Foreshadowing and flashbacks allow the author to defy time while telling the story. A successful author will keep a reader entranced by clever pacing built within the tale, sometimes confounding a simple plot by telling stories within stories.

The last third of the novel takes place in 1960, after Trujillo imprisons Minerva, Patria, María Teresa, and their husbands. One of the most dramatic sections comes to us through the diary entries of María Teresa in Chapter Eleven. She describes the suffering they experience in jail, and Minerva's hunger strike. Concrete cells and prison guards cannot stifle the influence of the Mirabals. As Minerva is led to solitary confinement, her fellow prisoners beat on the bars and yell, “!Viva la Mariposa!”

Discussion Activities

Using the groups' timelines and character analyses from the last class, construct a comprehensive timeline that shows the dramatic build-up in the book. Ask your students to identify several major turning points that affect all of the sisters.

Discuss these turning points with the class. Do students feel that Chapter One makes the rest of the book anticlimactic, since the end of the story is clear? Why or why not? What actions, if any, could have prevented the tragedy? How might each of the sisters feel about being viewed as a martyr and symbol of freedom?

Writing Exercise

There are several moments throughout the novel when the importance of writing is evident. One example occurs as María Teresa receives a smuggled notebook to use as a diary while she's in jail. She writes, “It feels good to write things down. Like there will be a record.” Ask your students to imagine they are one of the Mirabal sisters or their husbands and write a short journal entry or letter from that person's point of view.

Homework

Read Chapter Twelve. Ask your students to identify three major themes in the book.

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Lesson Nine

FOCUS: Themes

Themes are the central, recurring subjects of a novel. As characters grapple with circumstances such as racism, class, or unrequited love, profound questions will arise in the reader's mind about human life, social pressures, and societal expectations. Classic themes include intellectual freedom versus censorship, the relationship between one's personal moral code and larger political justice, and spiritual faith versus rational considerations. A novel often reconsiders these age-old debates by presenting them in new contexts or from new points of view.



Discussion Activities and Writing Exercise



Use the following questions to stimulate discussion or provide writing exercises in order to interpret the novel in specific ways.

Rebellion against tyranny

Minerva Mirabal acts as a leader against Trujillo while in jail, but she struggles with a serious depression during her house arrest. Patria and María Teresa talk frequently about how much they miss their children. All of them miss their husbands, and, eventually, they lose their lives. Discuss the sacrifices each Mirabal sister makes for her rebellion against tyranny.

Freedom

While in prison, María Teresa comes to feel “something deeper” among the women “especially late at night, a current going among us, like an invisible needle stitching us together into the glorious, free nation we are becoming.” Ask students to consider how they would answer her question in this diary entry: “What is the real connection between people? Is it our religion, the color of our skin, the money in our pockets?”

Courage

When Minerva and Dedé go for a dangerous drive together, Minerva says, “I knew she had mustered up all her courage to come along.” When the guards confront them and asks which one is Minerva Mirabal, Dedé bravely says it is she. It is said that courage is not the absence of fear, but a willingness to face one's fears. How does each sister exhibit courage in a way consistent with her personality and responsibilities throughout the novel?



Homework

Ask students to begin their essays using the Essay Topics. Outlines are due the next class period.

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Lesson Ten

FOCUS: What Makes a Writer Great?

Works of fiction can illustrate the connections between individuals and questions of humanity. Great stories articulate and explore the mysteries of our daily lives, while painting those conflicts in the larger picture of human struggle. The writer's voice, style, and use of language inform the plot, characters, and themes. By creating opportunities to learn, imagine, and reflect, a great novel or play is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changes lives, challenges assumptions, and breaks new ground.

Discussion Activities

Ask students to describe the characteristics of a great book. List these on the board. What elevates a work of fiction to greatness? Then ask them to discuss, within groups, other books they know that include some of these characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *In the Time of the Butterflies*? Is this a great book?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. On the other hand, a great writer may also give voice to a unique sensibility and a personal vision of life and its possibilities. What kind of voice does Alvarez create in *In the Time of the Butterflies*? Does her work speak for more than one woman's personal concerns? What, if anything, does this voice tell us about the choices and responsibilities of life for a moral person in the 21st century?

Writing Exercise

Julia Alvarez said in her NEA interview, "We were the family that got out and came to the United States . . . we got out and [others] didn't make it. And so what is the responsibility of those that survive? To remember, and to remind. It's through telling the story that we really understand the full complexity of what happened to us. Not just the facts, not just the either-or, but the full, textured complexity of a dictatorship and how we got out of it." Ask students to respond to this quote as they write a letter to a friend, perhaps one who does not like to read, explaining why *In the Time of the Butterflies* is a great book. Students should make an argument that explains why this book has meaning for all people, even those who have no interest in other times or places.

Homework

Students will finish their essays and present their essay topics and arguments to the class.

***In the Time of the Butterflies* as a Work of Historical Fiction**

On the first page of the book, before one reads the table of contents or the opening lines of the first chapter, the reader is told *In the Time of the Butterflies* is “a work of fiction based on historical facts.” Julia Alvarez dedicates the novel simply: “For Dedé.” A memoriam page lists the names of three women—all from the Mirabal family—and one man, Rufino de la Cruz. Each shares the same date of death, November 25, 1960. By beginning the novel in such a quietly reflective way, Alvarez subtly signals the reader that one should pay close attention—that the characters and events in the book are an amalgam of historical fact and creative license.

On the first page of Chapter One, we learn that, “Now after thirty-four years, the commemorations and interviews and presentation of posthumous honors have almost stopped, so that for months at a time Dedé is able to take up her own life again. But she’s long since resigned herself to Novembers. Every year as the 25th rolls around, the television crews drive up.” Many readers will find themselves stopping there, thumbing back through the pages to read the dedication and memoriam pages again and wondering what took place that autumn of 1960. Like the *gringa dominicana* who makes a pilgrimage to visit Dedé in order to learn more about the Mirabal sisters, the reader is on a quest for the truth.

In historical fiction, truth is often based on emotional validity rather than factual reality. Authors, aware that they must turn actual people into three-dimensional characters, look for ways

to demonstrate the essence of each person’s thoughts, feelings, and emotions. When Julia Alvarez was researching the novel, she talked to Dedé Mirabal-Reyes and many others who knew the Mirabal family. Some of the novel’s scenes are clearly historical—such as Minerva’s acquisition of a law degree, the sisters’ role in the underground movement, and the major events leading up to their deaths. Other moments, such as Minerva slapping Trujillo at the dance (which occurs in Chapter Six), remain debatable. Dedé confirms there was a party and that a confrontation took place, but insists that her sister did not slap Trujillo, though she did publicly rebuff him. Popular legend still holds that the slap took place, and the event has even inspired a merengue dance.

Using this moment as an example, Julia Alvarez says, “It was very difficult when writing the book, because how do I negotiate that terrain, and what do I privilege as a point of view? Because once I’m in a novel, I’m in character—the truth according to character.”

In the novel’s postscript, Alvarez explains that she wanted to understand what gave the Mirabal sisters the special courage they needed to stand up to the dictator and his regime. “It was to understand that question that I began this story,” she explains. “But as happens with any story, the characters took over, beyond polemics and facts. They became real to my imagination. I began to invent them.”



Roles of Women in the Dominican Republic

Traditionally the Dominican Republic, like many nations in Latin America, has been a patriarchal society where the father is the head of the household, responsible for his wife and children, who answer to him as the family's final authority. In the period in which the novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* is set, this was the case, even though today, modern marriages allow for more equality. Family is a cornerstone of Dominican culture, and extended family provides support, identity, and a social outlet. Like the Mirabals, Alvarez's family members lived close to one another. Until her family fled the island in 1960, she and her sisters were surrounded by aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents.

In the time of the novel, social expectations for men were very different from those for women. Just as Señora Mirabal chose to ignore her husband's philandering in the novel, there was little stigma associated with extramarital affairs or fathering children out of wedlock. Many women turned and may continue to turn a blind eye to their husbands' infidelity. In general, men were praised for their "machismo," while women were expected to be pretty, obedient, and demure.

In this predominantly Catholic country, beautiful women continue to be prized, and the Virgin Mary remains the female ideal. The patron saint of the Dominican Republic is the Virgin of La Altagracia, the Virgin of Highest Grace. Many girls are named Altagracia in her honor. In fact, Julia Alvarez takes her middle name from this most highly regarded figure. Her children's book, *A Gift of Gracias: The Legend of Altagracia*, is based on the legend of the island's protector.

Partly because the Virgin is a powerful symbol and the mother of Jesus Christ, motherhood is held in high esteem. Women's roles and responsibilities, however, have rapidly been changing. Even though women are still expected to take on most of the responsibility of caring for children, there has been an increase in women's labor force participation and in the percentage of female-headed households in the Dominican Republic. Women are occupied in all aspects of the economy, and maternity is protected under the country's constitution. Today, employers cannot fire women for being pregnant. Constitutionally, women in the contemporary Dominican Republic have equal rights, including the right to own property.

In the Time of the Butterflies depicts Minerva Mirabal's struggle for an education, and the compassion she shows her half-sisters when she realizes what their lives might be like without an opportunity to obtain formal education. Indisputably, social norms have changed since the 1960s, and today women in the Dominican Republic are generally better educated than men. Statistically, they are more likely to be literate and stay in school longer than their male peers. Women are doctors, lawyers, educators, business owners, and professionals. However, as in many other parts of the world, they often receive lower wages for the same work and earn less in general.



The Fourteenth of June Movement and November 25th

On Sunday, June 14, 1959, members of the Dominican Liberation Movement with the assistance of Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro staged an invasion of the Dominican Republic and attempted to overthrow the dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo. The revolutionaries were divided into three groups; the first arrived near Constanza in the mountains of Cordillero Central by transport plane, while two others attacked from ships stationed offshore. The mission was short-lived, however. Trujillo's spies learned of the attack and the dictator's armed forces thwarted the plot.

In Chapter Eight of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Patria travels with Padre de Jesús and a group of women for a spiritual retreat in Constanza, a place she describes as “purple mountains reaching toward angelfeather clouds; a falcon soaring in a calm blue sky, God combing His sunshine fingers through green pastures straight out of the Psalms.” On the fourth day of her trip, gunfire and shelling break the sanctity of the place. Patria is changed when she watches a young boy die from gunshot wounds.

Though the invasion by the Dominican Liberation Movement failed, it inspired others to organize their efforts against the dictator. The underground effort founded by the Mirabal sisters and their husbands takes its name from this brave attempt of exiled Dominicans to restore democracy to their country. The Fourteenth of June Movement, sometimes called J14, soon had hundreds of members.

Trujillo had evidence of the underground efforts to overthrow his regime and imprisoned the Mirabal sisters, their husbands, and dozens of other

members of the Fourteenth of June Movement. The arrests were condemned by the Catholic Church, which had initially been reluctant to speak out against the dictator. As the resistance gained strength, the dictator declared that he had only two problems: the Catholic Church and the Mirabal sisters. In November 1960, he ordered the murders of Patria, Minerva, and María Teresa.

The date of the Mirabal sisters' deaths became recognized throughout Latin America as a day to end violence against women. In December 1999, the United Nations General Assembly declared November 25th the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The United Nations website (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/news/vawd.html>) explains:

The sisters . . . have become a symbol against victimization of women. They have become the symbol of both popular and feminist resistance. They have been commemorated in poems, songs and books. Their execution inspired a fictional account *In the Time of the Butterflies* on the young lives of the sisters written by Julia Alvarez. It describes their suffering and martyrdom in the last days of the Trujillo dictatorship. The memory of the Mirabal sisters and their struggle for freedom and respect for human rights for all has transformed them into symbols of dignity and inspiration. They are symbols against prejudice and stereotypes, and their lives raised the spirits of all those they encountered and later, after their death, not only those in the Dominican Republic but others around the world.

