



# Lit Kits

For Tween Book Club  
9-12 Year olds

## **McAllen Public Library Lit Kit Procedure**

Lit Kits are available for check-out to McAllen Public Library cardholders for use in facilitating book clubs. Lit Kits are boxed in containers with up to 16 books of the same title and include a binder with book discussion questions and an inventory tracker for use by the book club facilitator.

### **Searching for Lit Kits**

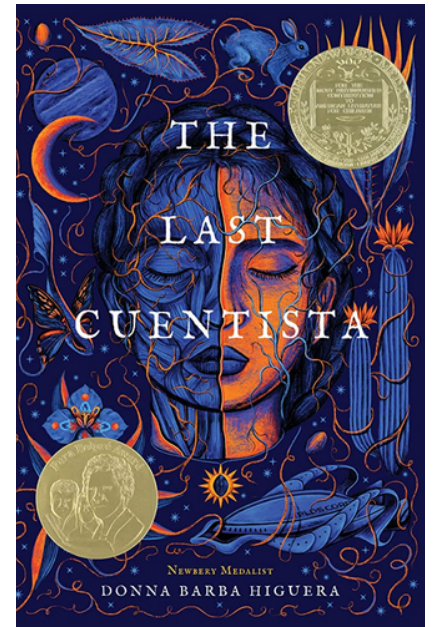
- A list of current Lit Kits is available in our catalog. To search, type “lit kits” in the “Search the Catalog” field on our webpage:  
<http://www.mcallenlibrary.net>.
- Patrons with a current McAllen Public Library card can place a hold on a lit kit and select the preferred MPL branch pick-up location. The patron will be notified when the kit is ready for pick-up.

### **Borrowing and Returning Kits**

- Lit Kits are checked out for six weeks and may be renewed one time.
- One Lit Kit may be checked out per library cardholder at one time.
- Only one library cardholder may check out a Lit Kit. This person is responsible for returning the complete kit by the due date.
- Single copies of the books in the kits cannot be checked out.
- Lit Kits must be returned to any McAllen Public Library location.
- A daily late fee of .10 cents a day per unit will be assessed for kits returned after the due date. Replacement costs will also be charged for lost or damaged materials.
- Library staff will check the content of each Lit Kit at the time of check-out and check-in. The replacement of any missing items shall be the responsibility of the cardholder.

**Book: The Last Cuentista**  
**By Donna Barba Higuera**  
**Published: 2021**

**Ages: 10+**  
**Pages: 336**  
**Genre: Science Fiction, Mexican Folklore, Dystopian**  
**Stand Alone Title**



## BOOK SUMMARY

There lived a girl named Petra Peña, who wanted nothing more than to be a storyteller, like her abuelita. But Petra's world is ending. Earth has been destroyed by a comet, and only a few hundred scientists and their children – among them Petra and her family – have been chosen to journey to a new planet. They are the ones who must carry on the human race. Hundreds of years later, Petra wakes to this new planet – and the discovery that she is the only person who remembers Earth. A sinister Collective has taken over the ship during its journey, bent on erasing the sins of humanity's past. They have systematically purged the memories of all aboard – or purged them altogether. Petra alone now carries the stories of our past, and with them, any hope for our future. Can she make them live again? Pura Belpré Honor-winning author Donna Barba Higuera presents us with a brilliant journey through the stars, to the very heart of what makes us human

**Source:** <https://www.dbhiguera.com>

## THEMES:

SCIENCE FICTION, DYSTOPIAN, MEXICAN FOLKLORE, GLOBAL WARMING, STORYTELLING, FAMILY

# MEDIA REVIEWS

"This is the work of a true cuentista: gripping, euphonious ("The wind carried it off far away into the stars"), and full of storytelling magic." - Publishers Weekly

"With poetic use of startling imagery and unabashed nostalgia, Higuera spins a tale that crosses the depths of space, interweaving Mexican folklore with a mystical strand of science fiction. An overall slow burner, this tale packs a wallop." - Kirkus Reviews

"A keep-you-up-all-night, compulsively readable science fiction novel that offers much food for thought." - School Library Journal

"Deftly blends Mexican folklore with science fiction in this thrilling and emotional post-apocalyptic novel." - Shelf Awareness

**Source:** <https://www.dbhiguera.com>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Donna Barba Higuera grew up in Central California and now lives in the Pacific Northwest. She has spent her entire life blending folklore with her experiences into stories that fill her imagination. Now she weaves them to write picture books and novels. Donna's first book, *Lupe Wong Won't Dance*, won a PNBA Book Award, a Sid Fleishman Award, and a Pura Belpré Honor. *The Last Cuentista* is her second novel.

**Source:** <https://www.dbhiguera.com>





# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are stories important? Why is it important WHO tells the story?
2. Do you think the society Petra lives in is a dystopian or utopia?
3. How do you think legends like La Llorona are started?
4. Why do you think she was named Petra? And why do you think it's relevant to the story and her individualism?
5. Why were people looting and why do you think Petra's mom responded this way?
6. By page 18, we learn about The Collective to which Petra's dad responds: "Equality's good. But equality and sameness are two different things. Sometimes those who say things without really contemplating what it truly means...that dogma runs a thin line." What do you think is the difference between equality and sameness?
7. What did Petra's mom make the mission ignore Petra's "genetic eye defect" condition?
8. How would you feel if you had to leave the place you called home?
9. How do the Spanish phrases in the book enhance the storytelling?
10. When people find out that Petra is a relic because she has kept her memories from Earth, Nyla says, "You are one of the few left who actually experienced what your kind had become. Polluting your own air and rivers and oceans...for profit. Starving some so others become bloated. It is for those reasons the Collective exists." What do you think about these reasons for creating the Collective? Do you think they were right in reforming the systems that once existed on Earth? Have they been doing things the right way?
11. Later on, Petra argues back that by honoring the past, our ancestors, our cultures— and remembering our mistakes—we become better. Do you agree with her? Do you think memories and stories are a way for us to better ourselves?

Source: <https://www.dbhiguera.com>

# CONVERSATION STARTER

“My cousin Helen, who is in her 90s now, was in the Warsaw ghetto during World War II. She and a bunch of the girls in the ghetto had to do sewing each day. And if you were found with a book, it was an automatic death penalty. She had gotten hold of a copy of ‘Gone With the Wind’, and she would take three or four hours out of her sleeping time each night to read. And then, during the hour or so when they were sewing the next day, she would tell them all the story. These girls were risking certain death for a story. And when she told me that story herself, it actually made what I do feel more important. Because giving people stories is not a luxury. It’s actually one of the things that you live and die for.” - Neil Gaiman

- 1. How does this story from author Neil Gaiman relate to the theme of *The Last Cuentista*?**
- 2. Can you remember a time when a story changed you or someone you know?**
- 3. How does this story change your view on the importance of stories?**

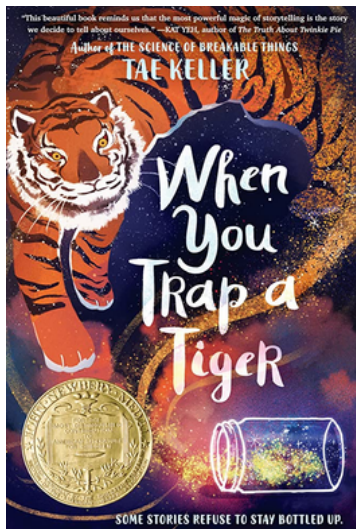
IF YOU LIKED THE LAST CUENTISTA,  
CHECK OUT THESE SIMILAR TITLES :



*Red, White, and Whole*  
by Rajani LaRocca



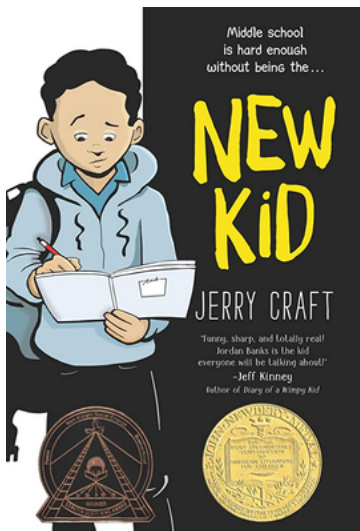
*StarFish*  
by Lisa Fipps



*When You Trap a Tiger*  
by Tae Keller



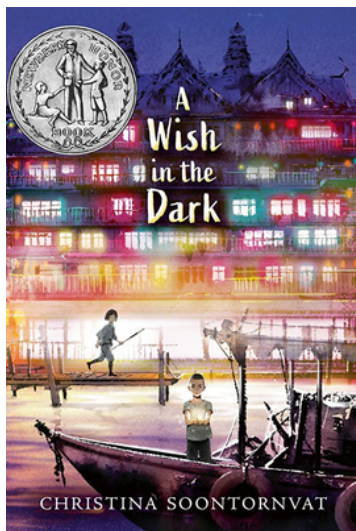
*Other Words for Home*  
by Jasmine Warga



*New Kid*  
by Jerry Craft



*Everything Sad is Untrue: (A True Story)*  
by Daniel Nayeri



*A Wish in the Dark*  
by Christina Soontornvat



*Fighting Words*  
by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley

## VOCABULARY

1. **Cuento**: story
2. **Cuentista**: storyteller
3. **Había una vez/Érase una vez**: Once upon a time
4. **En los tiempos viejos**: in the old times/in the olden days
5. **Abuelita**: diminutive for abuela (grandma)
6. **Pobrecito**: diminutive for “poor guy”
7. **Panadería**: bakery
8. **Subirse el muerto**: sleep paralysis
9. **Rubio**: blond/redhead
10. **Tristeza**: sadness
11. **Y se acaba lo que se daba**: That’s all there is to it
12. **Dogma**: A principle or set of principles laid down by an authorist as incontrovertibly true



