

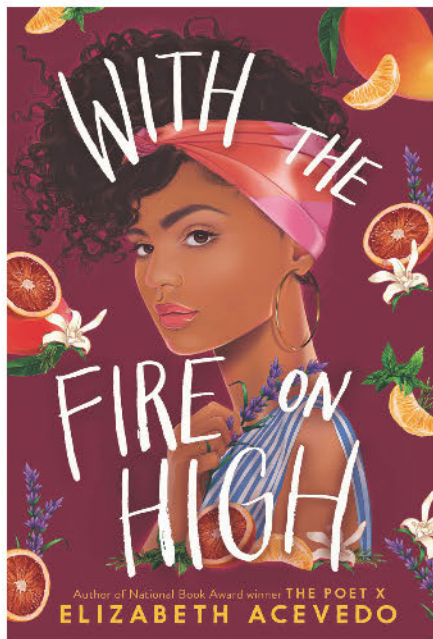
# Reading <sup>with</sup> Relevance<sup>®</sup>

Building Independent READERS and THINKERS

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR

*With the Fire on High*

A novel by Elizabeth Acevedo



Recommended for:  
Grade Levels  
9-12



# A tool to inspire change

This literacy curriculum is constructed around an authentically engaging novel that builds students' literacy skills and supports their social and emotional development. Students are motivated to read because they relate to the strong, diverse, and resilient characters featured in our selected novels and because each session gives them the opportunity to connect what they've read to their own lives.

Developed, field-tested, and refined in our own tutoring and mentoring programs, this standards-aligned curriculum has inspired persistently low-performing students to engage with literature, make meaning in their lives, and improve their English language arts skills. Now, *Reading with Relevance* is available to help you dig deep into the social, emotional, and academic needs of your students, whether in your classroom, after-school program, or youth development agency!

## Why

### *With the Fire on High?*

Told through the eyes of Emoni Santiago, a passionate cook who always puts a little magic in her food, this novel explores the challenges young people face as they inhabit the space between childhood and adulthood: from navigating complex relationships, to balancing the demands of family, school, and a part-time job, to making decisions about life after high school. We chose this book for its thoughtful exploration of important social and emotional themes: identity, family, love, teen parenthood, judgements, perseverance, and resilience. This curriculum will inspire students to connect Emoni's story to their own experiences—reflecting on their relationships, considering the significant decisions that lie before them, and navigating their own path into adulthood.



#### **This teacher's guide includes:**

- A facilitator's guide with tips and resources for implementing the curriculum
- A map of Common Core Standards addressed through this program
- 15 individual lesson plans, including vocabulary, discussion questions, journal prompts, extension activities, and all handouts
- Two assessments to monitor student progress throughout the program
- Regular checkpoints to help teachers assess their students' progress on ELA standards
- A culminating essay-writing unit
- An appendix with additional teaching resources and activities to continue exploring this novel

# Session 1

Pages 3–28

## Vocabulary

**murmur** (pg. 10): n., a soft, indistinct sound made by a person or group of people speaking quietly or at a distance

**loquacious** (pg. 19): adj., talkative

**pivotal** (pg. 22): adj., of crucial importance

**matriculation** (pg. 22): n., being enrolled in an educational institution

**martyr** (pg. 27): n., someone who either endures suffering or sacrifices their life for their belief in a greater good

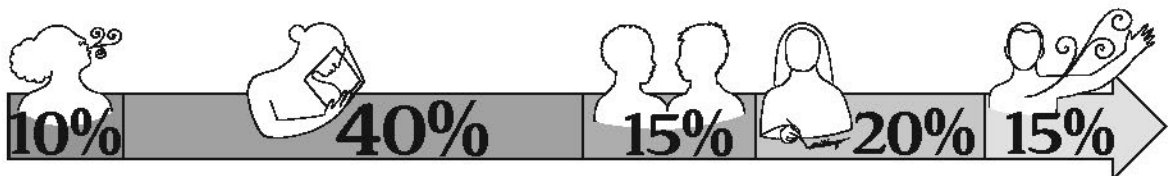
**immersion** (pg. 28): n., study or practice of something (often a language) by embedding oneself completely into a community or culture

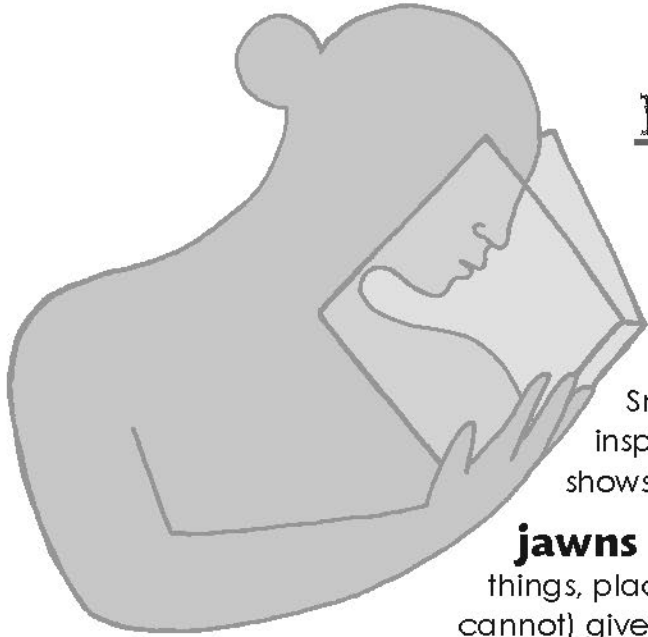
## Today's Themes

Today's theme is **life circumstances**. In today's reading, students will meet our central protagonist, Emoni Santiago, and begin to learn about her life. Raised by a single grandmother on disability, and tasked with raising her own two-year-old child as a single mother herself, Emoni faces certain challenges that make the circumstances of her life somewhat unique. While not all teenagers share the particulars of Emoni's life, teenagers everywhere do have to navigate their own set of circumstances that complicate the decisions they face as they enter adulthood. Invite your students to reflect on their own life circumstances. What situations or contexts have gotten them where they are today? How do their families, their homes, and their neighborhoods affect their circumstances? What responsibilities, aside from going to school, do they have to manage? What obstacles do they face: either day to day, or as they plan their next steps? Ask your students to consider something they have gained from growing up in their particular circumstances—how do these circumstances positively impact their lives?

## Story Setup

*With the Fire on High* is written from the perspective of Emoni, a high school senior who lives in Philadelphia with her grandmother and two-year-old daughter. Because Emoni has a passion for cooking, each of the three parts of the book open with a recipe that foreshadows some of the novel's upcoming themes.





## During Reading

**‘Buela** (pg. 6): short for “Abuela,” which means grandmother in Spanish

**“Jada Pinkett Smith success speech”** (pg. 7): actress Jada Pinkett Smith is known for giving passionate and inspiring acceptance speeches at awards shows

**jawns** (pg. 11): Philadelphia slang used to refer to things, places, people, or events that one need not (or cannot) give a specific name to

**El Gran Combo, Celia Cruz, La Lupe** (pg. 15): influential Latinx musicians, popular in the mid-20th century  
Greek philosopher.



## Discussion Questions

- The opening recipe (pg. 3) puts a twist on the idiom, “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” What does the phrase mean? When have you “made lemonade”?
- What does the serving description of the recipe suggest about Emoni’s relationship to food? Are there dishes that serve a similar purpose for you?
- What does Emoni mean when she says “I wanted to give Babygirl a nice name” (pg. 9)?
- What does Emoni’s name tell people about her before they even meet her? How does her name affect her opportunities?
- What does Emoni mean when she says that she was “that girl” on pg. 21?
- What implications or stigma go with teen pregnancy? How do these perceptions impact Emoni? Is this fair?

**FAMILY**

- Although Emoni is very close with her grandmother and her daughter, not everyone she considers to be family is related to her by blood. For example, she sees Angelica, her best friend since elementary school, as a sister.

**What makes someone feel like family?**

- » How does the kind of relationship Emoni and Angelica share differ from other friendships?
- » Which of your friends do you consider family? What does it take to consider a friend your family?
- » Is blood relation important at all?

**SELF-DETERMINATION**

- At the end of today's session, Emoni considers the circumstances in her life that discourage her from enrolling in the Culinary Arts immersion class. On page 28, she reflects, "...sometimes focusing on what you can control is the only way to lessen the pang in your chest when you think about the things you can't."

**Do you agree with Emoni?**

- » What are the things in your life you wish were different but feel you have no control over?
- » What gets in the way of being able to make the decisions you want to?
- » What are the things in your life you do have control over?
- » Is there something you could do to make your life "more how [you] imagine it" (pg. 28) or want it to be?

**Checkpoint**

- Students should demonstrate a command of the standard written conventions of English.
  - » Use capital letters appropriately: to start sentences, when referencing the book title, and when using proper nouns (like the names of characters or places). Remember to end every sentence with a period as well.
  - » For example, "I can always ask my mom or Mrs. Anderson for help."

**Extension Activity**

Emoni was very intentional in choosing to name her daughter Emma. In a society in which someone might be denied access to certain opportunities simply because their name suggests that they are not White, Emma, according to Emoni, is "the kind of name that doesn't tell you too much before you meet her" (pg. 9). This activity asks your students to examine their own names. .

**Handout:**

- » What's In A Name?



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

How did you get your name?

Do you share your name with an ancestor or important person?

Does your name have a specific meaning?

Name:

Is there a story behind your name?

Does your name hold special significance or meaning?

*\*Consider talking to members of your family to find out more and add that information to this worksheet!*

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## What's in A Name?



## Our Story

**We are a collective of progressive educators** on a mission: sharing and scaling the program we've built for (and with!) our students over the last decade, to inspire relevant reading experiences, heartfelt conversations, and instructional breakthroughs in classrooms across the nation. We wrote *Reading with Relevance* because we couldn't find the tool we needed to effectively teach our students. Most of the young people in our classrooms not only came to us two to four years below their grade level, but also with very real social and emotional struggles that sometimes felt more important than school. We came to believe that meeting students' social and emotional needs was the key to unlocking their academic potential.

*Reading with Relevance* leverages student interest in highly engaging social and emotional learning activities to develop crucial academic skills: reading fluency, comprehension, and critical thinking. We turn barriers to learning into the very tools that accelerate literacy.

## Training and Professional Development Services

*While lesson plans are designed to be easily facilitated by classroom teachers and after-school staff alike, our training and professional development services will ensure fully effective implementation of the literacy curricula. Additionally, we offer technical support, classroom observation, and program evaluation services to help your program be successful. Contact us for more information about these services.*

## Contact Us

*Contact us today to learn more about how the Moving Forward Institute can support your students and staff!*

**Online:** [www.movingforwardinstitute.org](http://www.movingforwardinstitute.org)

**Email:** [info@movingforwardinstitute.org](mailto:info@movingforwardinstitute.org)

**Phone:** 510-658-4475

**Mail:** 1425 Park Ave  
Emeryville, CA 94608

**Follow us on Twitter:** @RelevantReading

## If your students liked *With the Fire on High* . . .

they might love some of our other book selections! We suggest that you check out *The Hate U Give*, *The 57 Bus*, and *March*. Please visit our website today to browse our full selection of socially and emotionally rich novel-based curricula!