A note from the author

What makes your book real?

“The novel is inspired by a film I shot guerrilla-style in and around East Harlem, and in many ways, the realism of the book was sharpened against the actual streets where the story takes place. What’s real about WHEN WE WUZ FAMOUS is the fact that, in the course of making the film, many of the book’s scenes evolved from spending so much time in the real places where my fictional characters live and hang out, from the public garden on 104th Street where Francisco and Reignbow go for their romantic conversations, to Fort Tryon Park in Washington Heights, where the book arrives at its tragic conclusion.”

—GREG TAKOUDES

A note from the editor

What made you acquire this book?

“The hope of redefining oneself in a new environment and the potential for a brighter future are what Francisco longs for, but given his strong connection to his Latino roots, he is unable to separate himself from the trappings of that meaningful yet suffocating world. His complicated feelings regarding family, friendship, and obligation get in the way of his own future and leave him searching for the answers. It’s a powerful story about the human condition that will resonate with teen readers.”

—CHRISTY OTTAVIANO

Discussion Questions

- What do you think happens to Francisco and Reignbow after the end of the book? Will they be able to stay together? What forces might keep them together, or drive them apart?

- When Francisco gets in trouble at school, his dorm-mates appear to get off with a lesser punishment than he does. Why do you think this is? Who do you think should bear the most punishment for what they did?

- Francisco’s story shows how complicated it can be to leave home. Do you believe that leaving home shows disloyalty? Is it ever not okay to leave? If you left home to pursue your dreams, how would your friends and family react?

- Is Francisco and Reignbow’s relationship as perfect as it seems at the outset? Does her suspicion towards Vincent suggest her insecurity in her relationship, or protectiveness for her man? What ultimately causes their break: outside circumstances, or problems from within their relationship?

- Vincent is a lost, lonely character, but there is something about his desperateness that is easy to identify with. What do you think that is? Do you ultimately blame Vincent for Francisco’s downfall?

- Is Francisco’s lying to Reignbow excusable, since he was only trying to protect his best friend, or is it a terrible act of betrayal? Have you ever encountered a lie in a relationship? Can you forgive someone for lying to you, or forgive yourself if you have lied?

- Boarding school turns out to be a brutal experience for Francisco, but tough experiences can sometimes make us stronger, better people. What, if anything, do you think Francisco can take from his time at Seton Grove to make him a better person?

- What do you think happens to the Krew after the book ends? Will they be able to maintain their friendship, or all go their own separate ways? What are the ways that a core group of friends might lose touch and fall apart?

- Do you find the ending of the book to be pessimistic or optimistic?

- Reliance on others is a theme in this book, and the outcomes of that reliance are very mixed for these characters. Do you feel that you rely mostly on yourself, or on others? What are the pros and cons of these two life choices?