



WRITER Q&A: Lara Saguisag

AUTOGRAPH CORNER:

Full Name: Ma. Larisa Montserrat Q. Saguisag

Birthday: April 4

Zodiac Sign: Aries! I'm also a Tiger according to the Chinese zodiac

Schools: St. Scholastica's College (grade school and high school), University of the Philippines (BA), Hollins University in the US (MA), and am currently in the New School in New York pursuing my Master's degree in Fine Arts.

Favorite Movie: One of my all-time favorites is *Jaws* by Steven Spielberg.

Favorite Books: *The Princess Bride* by William Goldman; *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl; *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll

Family: There's my Mama and Papa, three hilarious brothers (Rebo, Nonoy, and Mikki) and one cute sister (Caissa)

Pets: I used to own a black cat named Charlie, but he died from a kidney infection. Sniff. My family has about a dozen dogs, three cats, and fish, and birds.

Ambition in life: I just want to create books that children will read over and over again.

BOOKS BY LARA

- *There's a Duwende in My Brother's Soup*
- *Tonyo's Wishes* (Likhaan Award for Best Story for Children)
- *Cat Eyes* (forthcoming)



WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE *THERE'S A DUWENDE...*?

I began writing *There's a Duwende...* primarily with the *duwende* image. The *duwende* is very much part of Filipino lives, I think. Every time I lose my keys or my hair band or my brush, I blame the *duwende*. I was doing research on this and working on a totally different story when I realized how many people blame the *duwende* for many things. If a child gets bruises, they say that a *duwende* has been pinching the child. If someone's ankle swells, that person stepped on a *duwende*. Slowly, a connection between the *duwende* myth and autism emerged. Many Filipinos tend to think that children are slow or, yes, haunted by a *duwende* because we are not taught to look for signs of learning disabilities.

I have a sister who has learning difficulties, and I was plain upset when her previous school told us that she was just dumb and should repeat the grade. They never even considered that she had dyslexia and a form of ADD (attention deficit disorder). We moved her to another school, and there, they supported her immensely.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN A CHILDREN'S BOOK WRITER?

Yes, yes, I've always wanted to write books for children. Ever since I read *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* by Roald Dahl. I thought writing was so much fun! That was the job I wanted. When I was young, I didn't know that you could make writing a profession. It seemed like you had to be a doctor or a lawyer. My dad is a lawyer, so that's what I put in slam books, even though I didn't know what lawyers did exactly.

WHEN DID YOU REALIZE YOU HAVE A GIFT FOR WRITING?

I don't think I have a gift for writing—I would call it a passion for reading that turned into writing. My parents gave us books and praised my early attempts at writing, and my grade school and high school teachers gave me good feedback on the stuff I did. I even won a couple of creative writing contests! But it was only in college that I got the kind of feedback from two awesome teachers that made me seriously consider writing as a regular thing to do: Issy Reyes and Jing Hidalgo.

ARE ANY OF YOUR BOOKS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL?

The three brothers in *Tonyo's Wishes* are based on my *makulit* siblings, but my brothers claim the characters are nothing like them. My new book *Cat Eyes* is based on my experience with stray cats. They always would stray into our yard and stare at me. I was always a bit scared of them because I thought they were trying to hypnotize me. And so I got this idea of cat hypnosis!



WHAT ADVICE CAN YOU GIVE TEACHERS WITH STUDENTS WHO HAVE A GIFT FOR WRITING?

Whether or not a child is perceived to have a gift for writing, teachers must inspire all their students to read and write more, and make both activities fun. It is as basic as not using a red ballpen for comments, because a red pen makes children feel they are being corrected, rather than taught. In grade school I was asked to keep a “Journal of Ideas,” and I was so excited I filled it with poems and designed my folder to make it look like a cat. But all my teacher ever said about it was that I had to make it more neat.

My ideas are: Encourage discussions of books, journal-writing, and freewriting. Play music, talk about the strange things that children like, like monsters and magic. Make them play rather than work at writing.

YOU'RE CURRENTLY STUDYING ABROAD. WHAT IS IT LIKE TO STUDY IN A DIFFERENT COUNTRY?

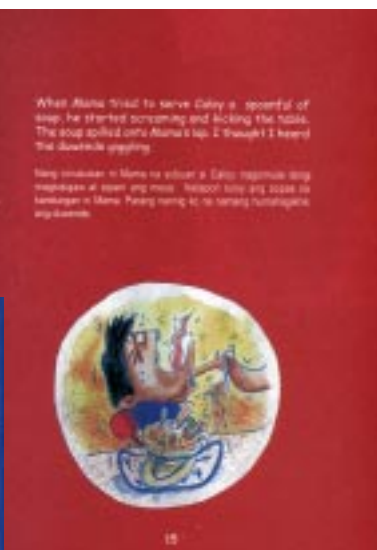
I like it. I just finished coursework at Hollins University and am in my second month for another degree at the New School in New York City. I learned a lot from Hollins and left the university with even more respect for children’s books. The New School is also cool. Many of my classmates are first-time writers, but they are creating really awesome stories. My teachers are easy to talk to—they are more like friends.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS AFTER YOU'RE DONE WITH YOUR STUDIES?

I plan to go back home and share what I’ve learned with my students and colleagues at UP. I also want to set up a publishing house back home that will focus on fun, nonsense stories, rather than folktales and moral stories. Plus, I would love to be able to do more school visits, especially public schools.

ANYTHING YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE WITH THE READERS OF STAR TEACHER?

I appreciate the fact that children and educators are reading the stuff I am writing and look forward to hearing from my readers. I want to learn more about the experiences of children in public schools, because I want to write about them. I write in English—many people say children in public schools have difficulty with the English language, and I am sad to hear that. I do hope that my books help children learn English. Also, if a teacher or student feels the urge to write, he or she should!



LANGUAGE BOOSTER

Adapt or Adopt?

BY MA. LUZ C. VILCHES

Words also suffer from identity crisis! Take the case of two often confused English verbs, *ADOPT* and *ADAPT*. A possible source of confusion is the fact that both words hint at the action of moving one thing from one situation to another. How are the two different?

Pronunciation guide:

adOpt sounds like stOp adApt sounds like bAck

ADOPT, which commonly refers to taking somebody else’s child to be part of one’s family, can also mean to take over something and use it as one’s own. It is useful to remember that *adopting* does not involve changing the object/idea being used. It only requires *transfer* of this from one owner, location or situation to another.

- Ms. Cruz *adopted* the school’s “speak English” policy in her class.
- Maria *adopted* the name Clara during her Confirmation.

What was adopted?	Who originally “owned” it?	Where was it “transferred”?
“Speak English” policy	The school	Ms. Cruz’s class
The name Clara	Someone else	Maria

ADAPT, on the other hand, carries the idea of *changing* what is usual into something new to fit another purpose.

The primary meaning of *adapt* is to modify, or make something suitable for a new use or situation. When you *adapt* something, you change it from one form to another.

- This camera has been especially *adapted* for use by scuba divers under water.
- These chairs have been *adapted* to suit both right-handed and left-handed children.
- Filipinos in the U.S. easily *adapt* to Western life. Filipinos are *adaptable*.

What was adapted?	Usual situation	New situation
Camera	“Above water” activities	Underwater activities
Chairs	Right-handed pupils only	Left and right-handed pupils
Lifestyle	Philippine life	Western life

The question now is: will you choose to adopt or adapt the principles in this article? That’s for you to decide!

ABOUT THE WRITER

Ma. Luz C. Vilches holds a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from Lancaster University, UK. She is the Chair of the English Department at Ateneo de Manila University. Before this, she was Executive Director of the Ateneo Center for English Language Teaching.