



A Reading Group Guide  
**The Charlie Hernández Series**  
By Ryan Calejo

**Book One: *Charlie Hernández & the League of Shadows***

**About the Book**

When a fire destroyed Charlie’s house, he didn’t think his parents would also disappear. While the police search for them, Charlie stays with a temporary guardian and avoids bullies at school. Charlie does his own sleuthing until one day he wakes up to a pair of horns on his head and a chest full of feathers, spurring a new mystery to solve! When his crush, Violet, doesn’t run after seeing his manifested lobster claw for a hand, Charlie realizes she can help figure out what the heck is going on! All Charlie has to work with are the Latinx myths his grandma used to tell him. He realizes the myth of the Morphling, a shapeshifter meant to save the world, closely represents what’s happening to him. The scary thing is, the Morphling isn’t the only myth that turns out to be real. Multiple sombras appear before Charlie and Violet as they search for his parents and an explanation, but which of them can they trust?

**Discussion Questions**

1. Charlie’s manifestations (horns and feathers) occurred after his parents’ disappearance. What is the relationship between these events? Use examples from the text to support your answer.
2. Violet begins investigating Charlie’s parents’ disappearance and his bodily manifestations. Do you think she has a right to investigate it? What about other

journalists? What role do journalists play in society, and are they necessary? Provide a rationale for your response.

3. How are myths passed down through generations? Use examples from the text.
4. Many sombras (mythical beings) doubt Charlie can be the fifth Morphling because he is so young. Have you ever been judged for your age or judged someone for their age? Why is this a problem? Explain your answer.
5. Why do different areas of Latin America have different stories for how the Morphling defeats the witch? What is an example of a modern myth or fairy tale that is different across cultures?
6. All the sombras Charlie meets are based in a cultural myth, except for Ponce de León, who was a real person. Research the history of conquistadors and their role in colonizing Latin America. Why do you think he is the only sombra that is based on a real person? Explain.
7. Why does Charlie lash out at Violet? Could you relate to either of the characters? Please elaborate. How could Charlie have avoided this situation?
8. La Cuca and other sombras are myths commonly used to scare children. Is there a myth you have heard that is meant to scare you into doing or not doing something? Did it work? Do you think fear should be used to get people to do things? Discuss with a partner and be prepared to share with the class.
9. *The League of Shadows* ends on a big cliff-hanger! Brainstorm how the story would have picked up in the second book if it had ended when Charlie discovered where his parents were hidden. What could have gone wrong? How would the story change? What could Charlie have done differently?
10. Was it fair for Alvin and Sam to be upset with Charlie for not telling them his secrets and ignoring them? Consider how you would feel if you were in their shoes. Explain your answer.
11. Look up the definition of a “redemption arc.” Did La Calaca and La Llorona each have a redemption arc and was it satisfactory? How else might a character achieve a redemption arc? Use examples from the text to support your answer.

12. Why did the villain of this book make Charlie's parents disappear? Discuss how isolating a child makes them vulnerable and an easier target. How does this connect to real-life experiences of children and teens without parents or guardians, or who have temporary guardians?

### **Extension Activities**

1. Charlie's local cemetery plays a key role in this story as it introduces new characters and a portal to new realms. As a class, choose a famous cemetery and research its history and culture. As a bonus, think about how you might find information about your local cemetery. You could even reach out to a local historical society or your local library.
2. In pairs, choose a myth or legend introduced in *The League of Shadows* and find more information about it, including what country it originates from and how the story has changed. Create a visual presentation to share with the class. You can make a PowerPoint, collage, poster, diorama, short video, or short podcast episode.
3. What is a myth or legend from your culture? Write a short story from your perspective where you encounter this myth or legend. Under what circumstances would you meet them? What journey would you be taking? What are the challenges? What is the resolution?
4. The myth of La Llorona is about a woman portrayed as having "gone crazy" after her husband cheated on her to the extent that she killed her own children. La Sihuanaba is cursed for making a mistake and cheating on her husband. Not only she is punished, but so is her son, who is given backward feet. Write a reflective essay on the root of myths and how differences of gender, social class, and race can influence what happens to people in the myths. Respond to the following questions: Is it a problem to use mental illness and disabilities to punish people? What messages do these stories send? Did La Llorona, La Sihuanaba, and their children deserve the punishments they received? Think about the mistakes you have made. Would it be fair for you to be given the head of a horse? Is punishment the solution to stop people from making mistakes and committing harm?

## **Book Two: *Charlie Hernández & the Castle of Bones***

### **About the Book**

Charlie is eager to get his life back to regularly scheduled programming: his parents are home, his friends aren't mad at him anymore, and he finally has an answer to the animal parts that manifest on his body. Just when he thinks he can focus on learning how to harness his powers, Queen Joanna, leader of La Liga, is kidnapped and Charlie is the only one who can track her down. His friend, Violet, insists on joining him on an expedition through Central and South America where they pick up a foe-turned-friend, Brazilian prankster Saci Pererê. Inside Saci's trove of knick-knacks, Charlie finds a memory that reveals there's a traitor amid La Liga helping an evil necromancer's attempts to rule the world. Can Charlie control his manifestations and save the day?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How do Charlie's Morphling abilities manifest? Using examples from the book, explain why each animal is useful to Charlie in each moment?
2. Why did Charlie, Violet, and Queen Joanna travel to Portugal first and not Latin America? As a class, research and discuss the connection between Portugal and Brazil.
3. Queen Joanna tells Charlie, "I fear I lay too heavy a burden on you, that perhaps you are not ready. However, it is not upon the ready that great tasks are laid, but merely upon the willing." What does she mean by this?
4. When Charlie's mom is nervous, she cooks. Why cook instead of something else? How do you cope when you feel nervous?
5. What was your reaction when Alvin asked Charlie to wear his dog's collar? Why not give Charlie a smartphone with a tracking app installed instead?
6. Consider the quickly changing setting in this book, and discuss the importance of it. Could this story have been told in a single town or city? Use examples from the text to support your answer.
7. Think about the advice Charlie's grandma shared with him: "If you don't take risks, you can't win." (Chapter forty-three) What does that mean? Do you have any pieces of wisdom that elders in your community have shared with you?

8. Violet talks about her Spanish heritage and how she feels sad that she couldn't speak to her grandpa because of a language barrier. Do you think these feelings influence her interest in Charlie's journey? How does losing connections to one's culture affect the characters? Explain your answers.
9. When Charlie finds the painted memory of Joanna grieving her lost love, he learns that she may have a "bad" side. In pairs, discuss whether we are all one-hundred-percent good or one-hundred-percent bad all the time? How do you define "good" and "bad"? Use examples from the text and your personal experiences to back up your answers. Be prepared to share with the class.
10. Saci says he hates people who stereotype others, but then immediately stereotypes the muki. What is this an example of? How does this statement demonstrate Saci's personality? Use examples from the text to support your answer.
11. *The Castle of Bones* is full of shocking plot twists. Were you able to predict any? Find examples of foreshadowing in the text.
12. In the end, Saci becomes a real friend to Violet and Charlie and vice versa. How would you define friendship? What does it mean to be a friend?
13. Think about Saci's confession about being isolated and judged for his differences. Have you ever felt this way or treated someone unfairly because of their differences? Why? As a class, discuss how this affects a person's behavior. You can use examples from the text or personal experience to support your responses.

### **Extension Activities**

1. Charlie morphs into all types of animals when he encounters dangerous situations, like when he grew the skin of a stingray to protect himself from heat. Take three minutes to write about a time when you encountered a situation that made you feel scared, anxious, nervous, powerless, confused, curious, challenged, or a similar feeling to Charlie. Then, get into groups of three to share your experiences. As a group, brainstorm and research what animal traits would help you overcome those feelings. What would morph on your body and why? How do your animals complement one another in your super trio?
2. *The Castle of Bones* is a thrilling adventure across various countries with Charlie, Violet, and Saci braving many obstacles. In groups, identify the major points of the story: exposition, conflict, climax, falling action, and resolution. Then design a game that

addresses these points. Think about what type of game works best, whether it's a board game, an online multiplayer game, a platform video game, or something else. Create instructions for how to play the game and marketing visuals to show players what to expect.

3. A great theme of this book is transformation in all its forms, whether literal, physical, emotional, or mental. Choose a character from the story, and write an exploratory essay on their journey of transformation.
4. When Charlie asks a muki about El Dorado, the cave-dwelling dwarf accuses him of wanting to steal his community's land and kill them off. Why does the muki think this? Find an example of a real-life injustice that is similar to what happened to the muki dwarves.

## **Book Three: *Charlie Hernández & the Golden Dooms***

### **About the Book**

In this third installment of Charlie Hernández, our favorite Morphling still hasn't got the hang of his morphing powers or the confidence to ask Violet out on a date, but those are the least of his concerns. His cousin, Raúl, has moved in, while a number of mysterious occurrences have cropped up, including thirteen missing people, lizard-men, cursed red roosters, a werejaguar, and a calaca Charlie can't shake off. Violet quickly forms connections that reveal La Mano Peluda is again scheming to destroy the magical barrier between realms. Readers are introduced to the Sociedad de Calacas and their task to protect the Golden Dooms, twelve ancient watchmen who form the magical barrier. Will Charlie and his friends find and protect the Golden Dooms before the bad guys demolish them?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Violet knows a lot about antiques because of her parents' antique shop. Charlie knows about animals from his dad and myths from his grandma. What have you learned from the adults in your life? What can adults learn from young people?
2. Charlie feels insecure and competitive toward his cousin, Raúl. Why? How are they similar? How are they different?
3. Discuss the use of parentheses in the book. How are they used to move the plot along or for character development?
4. The story is narrated through the point of view of the "chosen one" meant to save the world, but what do you think the story is like from the point of view of Charlie's loved ones? Use examples from the text.
5. Why does Raúl get told about his powers and allowed to join a society to support him, but Charlie has to learn through what seems like trial and error? How does this relate to Charlie's connection to his Latinx identity as someone born and raised in the US versus someone born and raised in Latin America?
6. Charlie calls out Raúl's machismo when Raúl refuses to admit he is in pain after getting attacked by Mr. Caiman's goons. What is "machismo"? How does machismo hurt men and boys? How does machismo hurt everyone else?

7. What is the purpose of the Sociedad de Calacas? Why is Esmeralda so scared for them to find out what she has done?
8. What type of secret would you hide in a Puesha? Without telling your secret, share with the class some of the symbols you'd use.
9. When Charlie can't manifest any animal parts for Coronel Diego, he angrily shouts, "Hey, MANIFESTING something doesn't *make* me a Morphling! ... I AM a Morphling. And I don't gotta prove it to you or anyone else in this daisy farm!" (Chapter thirty-six) In pairs, discuss whether Charlie has a right to be upset. Have you ever felt the need to prove yourself to someone? How did it make you feel?
10. Why is Violet so mean to Esmeralda? Did Esmeralda deserve to be treated that way? Explain your response.
11. There are many divides and wars between sombra communities, though some have a common enemy in La Mano Peluda. What stops them from working together? Use examples from the text to support your answer.
12. Coronel Diego threatens Charlie and his friends with death because he does not trust them after they don't name the traitor amid his crew. How do you define trust? As a class, make lists of how to earn trust, how to break trust, and how to regain trust (if possible). Use examples from the text.
13. What finally makes it possible for Charlie to morph by choice?

### **Extension Activities**

1. Violet collects clues to assist with her investigation. Develop a mind map to show her detective work and thought process. You can be as creative as you'd like by making mock pieces of evidence, or you can stick to text and connecting lines. How would you solve the mysteries in the book?
2. What do you think the letter from Charlie's abuela says? Write the letter and make sure to include sayings his abuela might say and clues for Charlie's next adventure.
3. *The Golden Dooms* references landmarks in Miami-Dade County as well as South Florida's ecosystem. Write a newspaper article about one of the following:



- a. A tourist attraction in Miami-Dade County, including a brief history and what you can do while visiting. You can choose a landmark mentioned in the book or somewhere new.
- b. An informative overview of South Florida's ecosystem. You can write about the environment, a natural disaster, animals, or something else.

*Guide written by Cynthia Medrano, librarian and member of Rise: A Feminist Book Project Committee.*

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