



# The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez

By Alan Lawrence Sitomer

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Sonia Rodriguez was born in the United States, but her parents are Mexican immigrants who came to California before she was born. Her father has three Social Security numbers, her mother is pregnant (again), and neither of them speak English. Sonia's mother spends most of her time in bed, watching soap operas, and letting Sonia clean up after her brothers. Sonia's father works dutifully to support his family, but he knows that his daughter's dreams are bigger than making *tamales* for family get-togethers. When Sonia attempts to put school work before her *familia*, her mother decides that it's time for Sonia to visit her grandmother in Mexico to learn "the ways of the old world." While in Mexico, Sonia spends time with her wise grandmother and her cousin Maria who teach her that while *familia* is important, the most important thing is to follow your heart. Sonia returns to the States determined to succeed in school, but the birth of her new twin siblings, inappropriate advances from her drunk uncle (Drunkle), and a forbidden relationship with an El Salvadorian boy push school to the back burner. If only Sonia can find the time to cook dinner, secretly meet with her boyfriend, avoid her Drunkle, AND finish her homework, she just might be able to graduate from high school...

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## Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 8–10—California-born Sonia Rodriguez, 15, the daughter of illegal Mexican immigrants, is determined to be the first high school graduate in her family. Her goal is nearly impossible to achieve when she is expected to cook, clean, and care for younger siblings while her pregnant mother lounges in bed watching *telenovelas*. Sonia's struggle is played out against a cast of stock characters, including her mother's obese, hyper-religious, and critical sister; her mother's alcoholic brother ("my drunkle"), who is frequently arrested and makes inappropriate sexual advances toward his niece; and her devoted, hardworking father, who seems oblivious to his family's exploitation of the daughter for whom he has high hopes. Sonia's awareness that her family's behavior reinforces negative stereotypes many Americans have about her culture strengthens her resolve to succeed. Despite her best intentions, the help of a sympathetic school counselor, and the wisdom she gains during a summer in Mexico with her grandmother, it seems that she will be defeated by her circumstances, but a surprising twist results in an uplifting ending. Sitomer, author of *The Hoopster* (2005) and *Hip-Hop High School* (2006, both Hyperion), in which Sonia appeared as a minor character, has a gift for capturing current high school culture and teen speak.—Ginny Gustin, Sonoma County Library System, Santa Rosa, CA

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From [Booklist](#)

Sonía, 16, thinks that sunny metaphors that portray America as a melting-pot are nonsense. Her parents are illegals, driven north by poverty across the Mexican border, but she was born in the U.S. and is determined to graduate from high school. Her struggle is part Cinderella fairy tale and part contemporary immigrant realism, as she is forced to cook and clean for her family and must stay up past midnight to get her homework done. Candid about the prejudice not only toward Latinos but also within the Latino community (her gorgeous, tender boyfriend is Salvadoran, so he must be kept secret), Sonía's first-person narrative expresses her fury at her family, including her mother, who still doesn't speak English and treats Sonía as a servant; her macho brothers; and especially her drunk uncle (druncle), who tries to rape her. But Papi works three jobs, and he is her strong support, and after Sonía visits Mexico, she gains new respect for her roots. Sonía's immediate voice will hold teens with its mix of anger, sorrow, tenderness, and humor. Grades 9-12. -Hazel Rochman

About the Author

Alan Lawrence Sitomer is California's 2007 Teacher of the Year. In addition to being an inner-city high school English teacher and professor in the Graduate School of Education at Loyola Marymount University, Mr. Sitomer is a nationally renowned speaker specializing in engaging reluctant readers who received the 2004 award for Classroom Excellence from the Southern California Teachers of English and the 2003 Teacher of the Year honor from California Literacy. *Homeboyz* is the final volume in his young adult trilogy of novels that began with *The Hoopster* and *Hip-Hop High School*. Alan is also the author of *Hip-Hop Poetry and The Classics*, a text used in classrooms across the United States to engage disengaged students.

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