

“Silent Dancing”

Judith Ortiz Cofer

Judith Ortiz Cofer was born in Puerto Rico in 1952, and moved to the mainland US with her family when she was four years old. A prolific writer, Ortiz Cofer has published several novels, as well as collections of poetry, essays and short stories, many of which have won prestigious awards. Much of her writing focuses on her life, sometimes fictionalized, growing up Puerto Rican in Patterson, New Jersey. The excerpt below comes from her novel Silent Dancing,

Vocabulary...

revelers (n)	adept (adj)	assimilation (n)
tenement (n)	demeanor (n)	sensory (adj)
vivid (adj)	sensuous (adj)	ubiquitous (adj)
influx (n)	yearning (v)	humility (n)
phenomenon (n)	perpetually (adj)	primitive (adj)
adversary (n)	permeated (v)	cavernous (adj)
upholstered (v)	fraternizing (v)	reverberations (n)

Reading Questions...

1. What do the italicized portions of the text represent? Why don't they continue as separate paragraphs all the way through to the end of the text?
2. Why does the narrator's family live in El Building, if they are not allowed to talk to and befriend their neighbors? Whose rule is this?

Discussion Questions...

1. Why did Ortiz Cofer title her story “Silent Dancing”? How does she describe the silent dancers? What is their significance?
2. Why do the narrator's dreams (or nightmares) take the form of this home movie from her childhood? When she is talking about the movie itself, does it seem like a nightmare? When she talks about it as her dream (nightmare) what is different?

Activities and Assignments...

1. Childhood memories are often blurry and highly influenced by what others remember. Try to recall a memory from your childhood and write a short essay about it. Then ask someone else who was present to tell you their version of the same memory (without your input!). Compare the two stories. What is different? Why do things change based on who is telling the story?
2. The Latino characters in this story talk about the discrimination they faced as a result of migrating from Puerto Rico (the island) to the continental United States (the mainland). What do you think of the ways they were treated? Is it justified? Write an essay that makes an argument for why they should or shouldn't be treated this way.

