Memoir: A memoir is a form of autobiographical writing in which a writer describes important events in his or her life. Most memoirs

• use the first-person point of view

• are true accounts of actual events

• describe conflicts faced by the writer

• include the writer’s feelings about historical events or social issues

Author’s Background: Where Is Home? Julia Alvarez emigrated from the Dominican Republic to the United States when she was ten. Her father had taken part in an underground plot against dictator Rafael Trujillo, so the family’s safety was in jeopardy. Although Alvarez and her family escaped, she found it difficult being cut off from her homeland and adjusting to a new country. Books offered Alvarez a world where she did not feel alone. Through writing, she could begin to connect her two cultures. She likes to quote another poet in saying, “Language is the only homeland.”

Historical Background: The people of the Dominican Republic suffered under the brutal dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo and his supporters for 31 years (from 1930–1961). Under his rule, masses of people were slaughtered for “crimes” as minor as not hanging his portrait in their homes. Many brave Dominicans, including Alvarez’s father, tried to overthrow this government. Those caught faced terrible consequences.

From the official website: http://www.juliaalvarez.com/about/

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I was born in New York City during my parents' first and failed stay in the United States. When I was three months old, my parents, both native Dominicans, decided to return to their homeland, preferring the dictatorship of Trujillo to the U.S.A. of the early 50s. Once again, my father got involved in the underground and soon my family was in deep trouble. We left hurriedly in 1960, four months before the founders of that underground, the Mirabal sisters, were brutally murdered by the dictatorship.

It's not like I didn't know some English at ten when we landed in New York City. But classroom English, heavily laced with Spanish, did not prepare me for the "barbaric yawp" of American English -- as Whitman calls it. I couldn't tell where one word ended and another began. I did pick up enough English to understand that some classmates were not very welcoming. Spic! a group of bullies yelled at me in the playground. Mami insisted that the kids were saying, Speak! And then she wonders where my storytelling genes come from.

When I'm asked what made me into a writer, I point to the watershed experience of coming to this country. Not understanding the language, I had to pay close attention to each word -- great training for a writer. I also discovered the welcoming world of the imagination and books. There, I sunk my new roots. Of course, autobiographies are written afterwards. Talk to my tías in the D.R. and they'll tell you I was making up stuff way before I ever set foot in the United States of America. (And getting punished for it, too. Lying, they called it back then.) But they're right. As a kid, I loved stories, hearing them, telling them. Since ours was an oral culture, stories were not written down. It took coming to this country for reading and writing to become allied in my mind with storytelling.

1. Identify tone: copy two phrases that show humor

2. Understanding meaning: explain what she means by “watershed experience.”

3. Draw conclusions: Alvarez describes four ways she encountered language, which provided the foundation for becoming a writer. What are they?