



# **Families of Puerto Rico**

## **Teacher's Guide**

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## **Families of Puerto Rico ---- Jose 9 Years Old**

This is the island of Puerto Rico. I live with my mother, father and 12-year-old sister, Tanya. My name is Jose and I'm 9 years old. We live in a city near San Juan, which is the capital of Puerto Rico.

It's 5:30 in the morning and Mom's waking me up for school. Dad wakes up Tanya.

It's really hard for us to get up when it's still dark outside. We have to get up early because mom drives Tanya and I to school, and we need to leave our house by 6:30 so we won't get stuck in traffic. Mom says Puerto Rico is one of the most crowded islands in the world, and sometimes it seems like we're all on the same road at the same time.

Puerto Rico is an island in the warm Caribbean Sea. It gets hot here, so mom puts antiperspirant under my arms so I won't sweat so much.

Mom makes everyone cocoa for breakfast, and we're also having cereal. TV's just starting for the day, so they always play the Puerto Rican national anthem. They show our flag and the capital building here in San Juan. Puerto Rico is part of the United States, but we're not a state, we're a commonwealth.

Today we really want to watch the weather report because for the last few days a big storm called a hurricane has been forming over the Atlantic Ocean. Now it's starting to move in our direction. Weather reports can tell us where the hurricane is and how strong the winds are. But we just have to wait and see where and when it will move.

Dad packs cold drinks for us to take to school. Then he loads my book bag in the car. We take our books home every night and they're so heavy that most students have book bags with wheels.

It takes about a half-hour to get to Tanya's school if traffic isn't too heavy. We're watching the sky and wondering if those are hurricane clouds.

Tanya wants to be an artist, so she goes to a special art school.

Most young people finish high school or college and live with their parents until they get married. Some parents won't allow their daughters to go out on a date unless they have a brother or older friend with them. But all

parents think good manners are important. So we're taught not to look adults in the eye, not to show anger in front of strangers, don't stare, don't call older people by their first names unless they ask you to, don't speak unless spoken to, don't yell, and don't enter or leave a room without permission.

After mom drops me off at school, she goes to the hospital where she works as a nurse. She supervises a kidney dialysis unit. Mom says our kidneys clean our blood. If someone's kidneys stop working, these machines can clean their blood for them. That's called dialysis.

Dialysis has to be done every couple of days. So Mom and the other workers decide to call people who use the machines and tell them to come in right away, because if the hurricane hits, they may not be able to get to the hospital for several days.

While we're in school, Dad's visiting customers. He works for a company that makes scales that scientists use to weigh things. Sometimes they need to have their scales adjusted, or fixed.

In science and medicine it's important to weigh things exactly right. Dad knows just how much this metal piece weighs, and he adjusts the scale until it shows exactly the same weight.

After Dad picks Tanya up from school, he stops at a cash machine. The way it works is that the bank's computer gives Dad the amount of money he wants, and then the computer subtracts that amount from the money Mom and Dad have in their bank account. Puerto Rico uses US dollars.

Then Dad and Tanya go shopping for things we might need if the hurricane hits. Bottled water is on everybody's shopping list because hurricanes can cause floods that pollute the city's drinking water. They get batteries for flashlights and portable radios in case the wind knocks down electric wires so we don't have electricity. Some of the shelves in the store are already picked clean by people who want to buy food they can eat without cooking.

Everyone's wondering, Will the hurricane hit Puerto Rico or not? The weather center gives each hurricane a name, and this one is called Jose, which is my name and my Dad's name.

People all over the island are preparing by covering their windows so they won't get broken.

People check the TV often to see where the storm is and how strong the winds are. Jose is already hitting some of the other Caribbean islands, and it's caused lots of damage.

But the weather here in Puerto Rico is still fine. Kids are jumping off the bridge like they do on most sunny days.

Tourists are wondering how much more time they'll be able to spend on the beaches. Lots of tourists come to Puerto Rico, especially on big cruise ships.

They like to visit El Morro Fort. The Spanish built it after Christopher Columbus came. Columbus was the first European to come to Puerto Rico. He was on his second voyage to the new world, looking for land for Spain. He found thousands of native people already living here, but he told them "This island now belongs to Spain!"

The native people called the island Borinquen. That means "Land of the Noble Lord" after the creator god Yukiyu. But the Spanish changed the name to Puerto Rico, which means "rich Port", even though the island already had a name!

This is Old San Juan. It's the oldest part of the capital city. But modern San Juan has grown so much; you can drive for an hour and still be in the city!

The weather is still good enough for people to visit El Yunque Rain Forrest. Lots of forest was cleared for growing sugarcane and later tobacco. The Spanish forced the native people to work in the cane and tobacco fields. Later the Portuguese brought slaves from Africa to do the work. That's why Puerto Rico is a mixture of many people and cultures.

At 3 o'clock Mom picks me up at my teacher's home, where some of us wait after school for our parents.

Dad and Tanya are getting home, too, and our dog, Chico, always comes out to meet us.

I also have a pet rooster whose name is Piojito. He pecks at anything he finds interesting, and sometimes that's me. I feed him rice, but he also likes to find food in the yard. I love animals and I'd like to be a veterinarian when I grow up.

My friends and I play in the road in front of our house.

While I'm playing, mom's cooking supper. She's making meat, rice, beans, and olives. We usually have supper at about 7 o'clock, and I like to watch TV while we eat.

Then I go back out to play while mom goes over the work I did at school. She signs each page to show the teacher that she looked at it.

When I come in, Dad washes dishes while mom helps me with my homework. It usually takes about a half-hour. It's still pretty hot, so we use fans to keep cool.

After I finish my work, I tell a friend about a place where Tanya's girl scout troop went. It has big walls with little places to put your hands and feet when you climb. You have to wear a safety rope that an older person holds at the other end, so you won't get hurt if you fall.

It's time to get ready for bed.

Mom says school's been cancelled for tomorrow because Jose is still headed our way.

But I'm so tired, that doesn't stop me from going to bed!  
Goodnight!

Oh, I almost forgot to tell you how the hurricane turned out! Well, the next day school was closed. The weather got windy, and the waves got bigger, and it began to rain. But a few hours before the hurricane reached Puerto Rico, the storm turned north and went out to sea, so it didn't hit our island. Even though everyone went to a lot of trouble to get ready, we were glad Jose didn't hit. Now things are getting back to normal. I guess people here believe it's better to be safe than sorry, even if being safe is a lot of work. What do you think?

## **Families of Puerto Rico ---- Laura 8 Years Old**

I live here on a farm with my Mom and Dad. It's 5:30 in the morning when mom wakes me for school. My name is Laura and I'm 8 years old.

I'm having cheese and toast, and an orange for breakfast.

Dad's having latte, which is coffee with hot milk and sugar.

After breakfast I finish getting ready for school. Students at most schools wear uniforms. Our school does too, but on days when we have sports, everyone wears gym clothes.

My school is almost an hour's ride from our farm. Dad drops me off on his way to work in San Juan. He says my book bag weighs more than I do.

I go to a private school, which means my parents pay for me to go there.

Puerto Rico has public schools, too, but this school teaches classes in both English and Spanish. Spanish is our national language because Puerto Rico belonged to Spain for 400 years.

It's good to know English here, because Puerto Rico is now part of the United States. Spain gave Puerto Rico to the United States when the US won the Spanish American war about a hundred years ago.

So we're now a US commonwealth. A lot of people think that's a good thing. A lot of others would like Puerto Rico to become a state. A third group, including my parents think that Puerto Rico should be an independent country.

That's because, even though Puerto Ricans are US citizens, we can't vote. So the United States often makes decisions for us that my parents think we Puerto Ricans should decide for ourselves.

Mom and Dad think the US must have felt the same way when it was a colony of England. The English were telling the colonies what to do, and the colonists didn't like some of the English decisions. That's why the colonies wanted independence.

Mom said people sometimes ask her why they want me to learn English, and she tells them it's because some day a girl who speaks good English will negotiate Puerto Rican's independence.

In the middle of the morning we have a snack. While we're eating we can hear the kids outside having their physical education classes.

In this game they try to grab the can in the center of the circle without getting tagged.

After snack break we have English class. In our school we also use English when we study science and math. Today our teacher reminds us to use the pictures in the book to see what the people in the story are doing to get clues about what they're saying. She says that works in real life, too.

While I'm in school, mom and her workers, Edwin and Guillermo are cutting bananas.

When Mom started farming, she decided to grow a kind of small, sweet bananas. She says bananas are interesting plants, because each plant only makes one bunch of fruit.

After we cut the bunch, we cut the rest of the plant down. But there's a part of the plant under ground that doesn't die, it sends up a new shoot that will have a bunch of bananas in about a year. The old leaves and stem will rot and turn into soil to feed the new plant.

Edwin is using a machete to cut the banana plant. He and Guillermo make it look easy, but it's not.

About a year and a half ago Puerto Rico had a bad hurricane. Our family went to stay with my grandparents, who live in a strong brick house in town. The storm winds blew for 2 1/2 days. When it was over, my parents came back and found our barn had blown down and most of our banana plants had been destroyed.

Bananas from the new shoots are just ripening now. Mom decided to think of other plants that might grow faster. Finally she decided to grow tropical flowers.



Mom's friend thinks she should grow food instead of flowers. That's because if times get bad and people don't have much money, they'll still need to buy food, but they won't have to buy flowers. Mom says she's going to grow both.

Mom and Dad learned how to raise plants in college. They believe in growing things in ways that keep the soil and our planet healthy. So mom's always thinking of ways to do that.

One way is with fertilizer. Plants need food just like people do. Plant food is called fertilizer. Mom likes to use fertilizers that will help make the soil healthier as it feeds her plants. So she and her workers go to a chicken farm and put the chicken manure in bags to use as fertilizer on our plants.

Manure is the stuff that's left when the chickens go to the bathroom. Well, chickens don't really use a bathroom. Oh, you know what I mean. Manure's what's left of food after digestion is done.

It makes great fertilizer because it has lots of food plants can use.

Another way mom keeps the soil healthy is with a big, tall grass called patchouli. Mom's crazy about patchouli. That's because it solves a big problem. A lot of Puerto Rican farms are on mountainsides, and heavy rain often washes soil away, down the mountain. That's called erosion.

Each patchouli plant can be divided into a lot of little pieces. They plant the pieces in rows along the hillside. Each one will grow into a big plant in a few months. Patchouli grass holds the soil in place and helps the rain soak into the ground instead on running down the mountain.

Mom says that by making our soil healthy and by keeping the soil in place, our land should get better and better as the years go by.

Dad works for a company in San Juan that sells fruit and vegetables to stores and restaurants. Many fruits and vegetables are grown at different times of the year all around the world.

So if a restaurant wants to buy tomatoes, Dad knows he can find them in Puerto Rico in February, or in New Jersey in August, or in South America at other times of the year. His computer helps keep track of his customers'

orders. If a customer wants to know why they haven't gotten the oranges they ordered, Dad's computer can tell them the oranges are still on a ship coming from Jamaica.

At about 3, Mom leaves home to pick me up at school. We have a rain gauge in our yard so we can measure how much rain we get.

On the north central side of the island, where we are, we get almost twice as much rain as on the south side.

She needs to stop for a few things at the grocery store in town. My parents would like to grow as much food as they can for our family. And they try to buy only things we really need. They say they don't want to waste their lives working to make money to buy things they don't need. That's one reason we don't have a TV. They think the ads on TV try to make us think we need to buy something so we can look or feel good.

Today after Mom picks me up, she takes me to a piano lesson that I have once a week. I fell asleep during the half-hour ride to my teacher's house, and it takes me a while to wake up. My music teacher is a singer and dancer.

After my lesson we go home, and mom and I check to see how much rain we got today.

Then we have supper. We're having rice, beans and ham that mom made yesterday. When Mom cooks, she likes to make enough so we can eat it for several meals. Then she doesn't have to spend so much time every day cooking.

Mom peels an orange for me. The idea is to take off the orange part of the peel and leave the white part, so the orange is soft and squishy, but doesn't have any leaks. Now I can drink the juice from my disposable container!

I take a shower before I do my homework. When I take a shower I'm usually not alone. Two coquis live in a toy boat on the edge of our bathtub. Coquis are very small frogs that have very large voices!! People like to have them in their homes because they eat insects. And they sing us to sleep!!

Coquis often climb to the tops of trees during the night and when the sun comes up, they jump all the way to the ground without getting hurt!

Dad said once he was playing his guitar in the bathroom so he wouldn't keep mom awake and the coquis were singing along with him. When he started playing, they started singing! When he stopped, they stopped. Maybe Dad and the coquis should go on tour!

I usually do homework for about an hour before I go to bed. Mom helps me use a big Spanish language dictionary to look up the meaning of words I don't know.

Today Edwin's family and ours are going on a special trip about an hour away to see the world's largest radio Telescope. While we're waiting to go in, we're listening to sounds with my directional microphone.

It let's us hear things clearly, even if they're far away. It works almost exactly like this huge radio telescope we came to see. But this telescope isn't listening for birds.

It's listening for radio waves from outer space. They hope to hear signals that tell us there's other intelligent life in the universe.

Even when I'm tired, I like to read a story before I go to sleep.

After the hurricane destroyed our barn, Mom and Dad moved my bed into the living room, so they could use my bedroom to store some things that couldn't be left outside.

After we build our new barn this summer, I'll move back into my room.

Dad and Mom talk while I read. This is special because Dad usually doesn't get home until mom and I are asleep.

Which is what I'm going to do now.  
Goodnight!

## Glossary

**Christopher Columbus:** The first European to “discover” Puerto Rico in 1493 and claim the island for Spain.

**coquis:** Small frogs that eat insects and “sing” at night.

**directional microphone:** Collects and focuses sounds to make them louder.

**erosion:** Wearing away the soil by water or wind.

**fertilizer:** A material added to the soil to improve plant growth.

**hurricane:** A violent storm with winds 70 to 100 miles per hour, usually accompanied by rain, lightning, and sometimes tornadoes.

**kidney dialysis:** Using a machine (to replace kidneys) to remove body wastes from a person’s blood.

**machete:** A long, curved knife used as a cutting tool or weapon.

**pachouli:** A tall grass from East India. Roots are used for their fragrant oil.

**radio telescope:** Used to collect and focus radio waves (non-visible light waves) from space to make them easier to hear. This is different from an optical telescope, which collects and focuses visible light waves to make them easier to see.

**San Juan:** The capital of Puerto Rico that was a thriving town almost 100 years before the Jamestown settlement.

## **Discussion and Activities After Viewing**

- Ask each child to list some of the similarities and differences between their family and school and those in the video.
- Invite someone from Puerto Rico to talk with the class about growing up on the island.
- List the things that Puerto Rican children learn are good manners.
- Discuss why Spanish is the official language of the island.
- Ask the class to list all the things they can think of to prepare for a hurricane.
- Discuss whether the class feels the island should be a commonwealth, a state or independent.
- Why didn't Laura's parents want to have a TV set? What did they mean when they said they don't want to waste their lives working for things they don't really need?
- Ask the class why fruits and vegetables ripen at different times of the year throughout the world.

## Questions

1. Hurricanes are strong winds. How can winds be dangerous?
2. Why might the population be evenly divided between those who want Puerto Rico to remain a commonwealth and those who want it to become a state in the United States?
- 3.. What does commonwealth status mean?
4. There is a great radio antenna in Puerto Rico that is looking for evidence of intelligent life on other planets. When Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas for the Europeans, the result for many of the Amerindians was tragic. A major reason was that they had no immunity to European diseases such as smallpox and measles. What other kind of impact can a newcomer have on a habitat?
- 5, Why do Laura's parents think it is a good idea not to have a television set at home?
6. Puerto Ricans are descended from Amerindians, the Spanish and Africans. How many places did your ancestors come from?

## Answers to Questions

1. Hurricanes are strong winds. How can winds be dangerous?

The force of the wind can tear off roofs, blow down trees. It is the debris flying through the air at 60 miles per hour (96 kilometers per hour) that is most dangerous. Such debris can break through windows and walls.

2. Why might the population be evenly divided between those who want Puerto Rico to remain a commonwealth and those who want it to become a state in the United States?

Puerto Rico has been in existence for over 500 years, the people and culture are a mixture of Spanish, African and Amerindian. The people may feel that they are sufficiently different from the United States to remain apart. Others feel that they should be a state and actually have a role in their governance.

3. What does commonwealth status mean?

Commonwealth status for Puerto Rico means that they are US citizens but have no vote in Congress nor do they vote in presidential elections. There is self-rule but the federal laws of the United States apply. Puerto Rico is also exempt from Internal Revenue Code.

4. There is a great radio antenna in Puerto Rico that is looking for evidence of intelligent life on other planets. When Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas for the Europeans, the result for many of the Amerindians was tragic. A major reason was that they had no immunity to European diseases such as smallpox and measles. What other kind of impact can a newcomer have on a habitat?

When pigs and rats were introduced to Hawaii, they decimated the bird population because birds had never had to deal with land mammals. Sometimes people stock a lake with a favorite game fish, and see it overwhelm other native species.

Kudzu introduced to Georgia to provide forage for cattle is now running amok and killing forests.

5. Why do Laura's parents think it is a good idea not to have a television set at home?

They feel that there is too much marketing on TV trying to get children to buy things

6. Puerto Ricans are descended from Amerindians, the Spanish and Africans. How many places did your ancestors come from?



## Some Things We've Learned About Puerto Rico

(Please circle the correct answer).

1. T F Spanish is the official language of Puerto Rico.
2. T F Puerto Rico is a colony of the USA.
3. T F Puerto Rico is on the continent of South America.
4. T F Weather reports can tell us when and where a hurricane will hit.
5. T F Rice and black beans are popular in Puerto Rico.
6. T F Puerto Rico's population is made up of Europeans, native people, and Africans.
7. T F Puerto Rico was part of Spain for 400 years.
8. T F Spain gave Puerto Rico to the USA when the USA won the Spanish American war.
9. T F The official currency of Puerto Rico is the dollar.
10. T F Puerto Rico is a state in the United States of America.
11. T F Puerto Ricans can't vote in US elections.
12. T F Bananas must be replanted every year.
13. Why do the parents in this video think it's important to learn English?
14. What does Laura's mother do to make her farm's soil healthy?
15. Draw a series of pictures telling Laura's or Jose's story. Try to include as much detail as you can remember from each part of the story.

## **Introduction**

Puerto Rico is known for its beautiful beaches, and the El Yunque National Park, the only tropical forest in the US national park system. It's capital San Juan is the second oldest city in the Americas. Puerto Rico is famous for being the most Spanish part of the United States.

## **Land and Climate**

The island lies in the warm Caribbean Sea. It is approximately 40 miles by 100 miles wide. (64km x 160 km). It is warm year around 75-85°F (24-30°C)., with hurricanes possible from the summer to fall. It is mountainous in the interior, where it can be much cooler.

## **The People**

The people are the descendants of Amerindians, Africans and the Spanish. The major language is Spanish, though many people speak English. The population is overwhelmingly urban, and fewer than 3% work in agriculture. Tourism is a major industry with over 5 million visitors a year coming for the sun and the ambience. The island has the highest standard of living in the Caribbean, but still languishes far behind even the poorest US state and continues to suffer high unemployment. Around two million Puerto Ricans work in the United States, principally around the New York City metropolitan area.

Puerto Ricans are friendly, hospitable and expressive. Puerto Ricans are well known for using lively hand and facial gestures while speaking. Most people are Catholics and the faith incorporates many aspects of Amerindian and African roots. The church and the families are important centers of social life, as are the religious festivals.

The cuisine can be traced back to the Tainos, the original inhabitants of the island, who thrived on a diet of corn, tropical fruit, and seafood. The Spanish added beef, pork, rice, wheat, and olive oil to the island's foodstuffs. Slaves from Africa brought with them okra and taro (known in Puerto Rico as *yautia*). The ingredients include paprika, pimiento, coriander, garlic, tomatoes, oregano, cilantro, plantain and breadfruit. The mingling of flavors and ingredients result in the exotic blend of today's Puerto Rican cuisine.

## History

Puerto Rico was inhabited by the Tainos, Amerindians who came from South America. Some 50,000 Tainos lived on the island organized in clans and led by a *Cacique*, or chief. They lived in small villages and lived on such domesticated tropical crops as pineapples, cassava, and sweet potatoes supplemented by seafood. In 1493 Christopher Columbus discovered the island in his second voyage to the New World..

A system was introduced where the Tainos were distributed to officials and colonists to work. The terms of the agreement specified that Spaniards were obliged to pay the Tainos for their labor and to teach them the Christian religion. The Tainos soon revolted but the revolt is put down with savagery. 6000 are purported killed and many left the island or escaped into the mountains. The Spanish then brought African slaves to the island. As few Spanish women came, there soon arose a people with Spanish, Amerindian and African ancestry.

The Spanish settled and fortified San Juan, one of the best harbors in the Caribbean. The location of the island in the main shipping channels made it one of the most strategic outposts in the New World. French, British and Dutch forces tried to conquer it to no avail.

The economy was based on sugar, ginger and later coffee. When Simon Bolivar declared independence for many countries of South American, many Spanish loyalists moved to Puerto Rico. In the milieu of the Napoleonic Wars, Puerto Rico was granted greater autonomy. Spain abolished the slave trade in 1835. In 1865, universal schooling was introduced. Puerto Rico began to develop its own distinct identity during the 18th century. A local elite arose comprising of immigrants and an emerging bourgeoisie of coffee plantation owners.

Strong sentiments existed in the second half of the 19th century for both continued loyalty to the Spain as well as some form of autonomy or independence. An unsuccessful revolt in the mountain town of Lares in 1868 focused everybody's mind on the seriousness of the problem at hand. Autonomy was achieved in 1897, but this became obsolete almost immediately when US forces occupied Puerto Rico during the Spanish-American War.

Puerto Ricans were granted US citizenship in 1917. Reform and investment improved the economy but the 1930s depression hit the island hard and the independence movement turned to violence. Puerto Rico won the right to elect its own governor in 1944. The United States provided tax incentives aimed at encouraging growth and investment in the island's economy..

Puerto Ricans voted overwhelmingly in a 1951 referendum to become a US commonwealth rather than stay a colony. It also received many refugees from Castro's Cuba as well as from the Dominican Republic. The statehood versus commonwealth debate continues, both on the island and in Washington DC. The last referendum was almost evenly divided between those seeking statehood and those favoring the status quo.

# Puerto Rico Fact Book

## Map of Puerto Rico



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