

Book Club Questions

Family Lore by Elizabeth Acevedo

1. Each of the sisters and nieces in Family Lore processes a gift, with Flor's gift at the center of the novel- if she dreams about teeth shattering, has terrible jaw pain, or her own teeth chatter, she knows when someone will die. What lore or gifts have been passed down in your family? What are your thoughts on them?
2. Family Lore alternates between the Marte women's six distinct voices throughout the story, with chapters highlighting Matilde, Flor, Pastora, Camila, Ona and Yadi. What traits about each sister are similar and different, and how does this affect their decision making throughout the novel?
3. Family Lore weaves the past and present, taking us from Santo Domingo and New York City over the course of three days and also seventy years. What differences do you notice between the first generation and the second-generation women in the text?
4. What roles do family land, herbalism, and natural food ingredients play in this novel?
5. Each Marte woman has a different relationship with Santo Domingo: Yadi misses home while Pastora was traumatized by home. Discuss each sister's relationship to her ancestral land and how this plays out throughout the story.
6. Discuss the role of matriarchs in the Marte family and compare this to your own family. What similarities and differences do you spot?
7. Now compare the Marte matriarchs to their partners. What roles do these men play in uplifting and also disparaging their spouses?
8. "I was not born with a gift, and I never developed one in the ways of my sisters, whose uncanny sense of the world came from beyond. I cobbled together my own gift. Claimed magic where I'd been told none could exist. That is what dancing was for me. And it was as powerful as any second sight or inclination toward healing." Matilde is said to be the sister who "was not born with a gift" but "cobbled together" her own. Do you feel her dancing could be considered just as much of a gift as the other Marte sisters' gifts?
9. This book uses folk traditions to incorporate magic realism in the text. "My mother's magic...is not an orderly system like how fantasy novels can describe the exact structure of where and whence and thusly. The women in my family get struck by an unknown lightning rod." What parts of it felt real to you? All of it? Some of it? Now compare this to your own cultural traditions. Are there similar elements?
10. Soraya encourages Ona to research her own bloodline, yet Ona collects her family stories with no real intention of using them. What do you think Ona's research is motivated by, then? What are some creative ways Ona could turn her family's lore into something shareable? If you were in Ona's profession, how would you showcase your family history?
11. Throughout the text, Ona sprinkles in historical facts about the Latin Kings, Dominicans being descendants of the Taino people, Christopher Columbus, and the 1521 slave rebellion at the sugarcane estate of Diego Colón. Did you learn about this history growing up? If so, what did you learn?
12. This novel shows different forms of self-care- Flor locking herself in the bathroom to lie in a tub and imitate the meditation she saw on television or putting on a mud mask once a week, and Ona going to therapy. How do the boundary and self-care practices and rituals mother and daughter exhibit change across generations, and how do they influence one another?
13. The snake dream is a significant omen in this story. Discuss what it means and its importance.
14. Flor gives a compelling speech about her life at the end of Family Lore, which raises the question of how we want to spend our lives. What does it mean to live well and die well? What kind of life do you want to live so that you can be okay about coming to terms with your own death?

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