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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

Like Water for Chocolate by Laura Esquivel

Summary

Earthy, magical, and utterly charming, this tale of family life in turn-of-the-century Mexico became a best-selling phenomenon with its winning blend of poignant romance and bittersweet wit.

The classic love story takes place on the De la Garza ranch, as the tyrannical owner, Mama Elena, chops onions at the kitchen table in her final days of pregnancy. While still in her mother's womb, her daughter to be weeps so violently she causes an early labor, and little Tita slips out amid the spices and fixings for noodle soup.

This early encounter with food soon becomes a way of life, and Tita grows up to be a master chef. She shares special points of her favorite preparations with listeners throughout the story.

Discussion Questions

1. Talk about the three De La Garza sisters—Gertudis, Rosaura, and Tita. How do they differ from one another?
2. Do you consider Tita a strong or weak female heroine? Does she change by the end of the novel? If so, how? Or if not, why?
3. Describe the matriarch of the family, Mama Elena. Does the revelation later in the book about her own history alter your opinion of her?
4. What about Nacha? Both she and Mama Elena represent maternal figures for Tita. How do their maternal qualities differ?
5. What role does tradition play in this book? Is it always a negative role, as exemplified by Mama Elena? What might the author be suggesting about family or cultural customs in general?
6. Discuss the magical properties of food and cooking in this book. In what way is food a central metaphor in the novel—what does it represent? How does Tita use food—as a weapon? Or does she use it for solace, seduction, or healing? Is her use of it unwitting or purposeful? How does food affect the actions of various characters?

7. What does the title of the book refer to—and what is its thematic significance? How does the title relate to the internal passions of characters?
8. Follow-up to Question 7: Discuss the images of heat and fire (as a symbol of desire) found throughout the novel. How does heat affect different characters? Are heat and fire sources of strength...or destruction?
9. Different characters are plagued with illnesses in *Like Water for Chocolate*. What is the significance—psychological or symbolic or spiritual—of those physical ailments?
10. What role do spirits (ghosts) play in the novel?
11. Talk about what happens when Tita finally stands up to her mother's ghost.
12. Compare the two male figures—Pedro and John Brown. What is each of the men's relationship with Tita? Why does she make the choice she does?
13. What do Tita's and Pedro's deaths suggest about love? About their love in particular?
14. What is the significance of the narrator's identity? What does it mean that she is the one who tells the story?

Summary from the publisher
Discussion Questions from www.litlovers.com