North Vancouver City Library

Like Water for Chocolate by Laura Esquivel

CITY LIBRARY BOOK CLUB READING GUIDE

About the book

This 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, using cooking to express herself and sharing recipes with readers along the way.

About the author

Laura Esquivel is the award-winning author of *Like Water for Chocolate*, which has sold more than four and a half million copies around the world in 35 languages, as well as *The Law of Love*, and most recently, *Between Two Fires*. She lives in Mexico City.

Interviews and articles

- **AARP**: "Like Water for Chocolate' Is Now a Ballet;" interview with Laura Esquivel [March 2023; article]
- **The New York Times**: "At Dinner with Laura Esquivel; Sensing the Spirit in All Things, Seen and Unseen" [March 1993; article]
- **Salon**: "Love and other illegal acts: Laura Esquivel on "Like Water for Chocolate," destiny and the thoughts of inanimate objects" [October 1996; article]
- **Medium**: "Till the Day I Die: How "Like Water for Chocolate" mirrors the Mexican Constitution of 1917 through the role of women" [September 2015; article]
- **The Conversation**: "Explainer: magical realism" [article]
- Recipes from Like Water for Chocolate

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Discussion questions

1. What word would you use to describe Tita, the book's main protagonist? What are her strengths and weaknesses? Does she change throughout the story?
2. What is the meaning of food in the book? What are some of the things that it represents? Why do you think that Esquivel gave it magical qualities and made it such an important focus?
3. What are your thoughts on Esquivel's use of magical realism in the book? What does it add to the story? Does a particular scene that utilizes magical realism stand out to you the most?
4. What is the role of gender in the novel – in particular, femininity, motherhood, and the role of women in society? What are some of the ways that the female characters express different versions of womanhood?
5. In the Salon interview, Esquivel spoke about how she's always been interested in destiny – in particular how family and societal forces attempt to determine it, but the expectations might not align with personal desires. How does the novel address the topics of tradition and destiny? What are some ways that the characters try to transform their fate?
6. What is your understanding of Mama Elena's character? What does she represent? Did your perception of her change throughout the story?
7. How would you describe the relationship between the 3 De La Garza sisters – Tita, Rosaura, and Gertrudis? How are they different, and how are they similar?
8. Compare and contrast the two men competing for Tita's affection – Pedro and John Brown. How would you describe each of their relationships with Tita? Why do you think that she made the decision she did?
9. Esperanza's daughter (Tita's great-aunt and Rosaura's granddaughter) is the book's narrator, but she's largely absent throughout the story. Why do you think that she was made the narrator? How would it be different if Tita told the story in a first-person narrative?
10. What is your interpretation of the book's title, *Like Water for Chocolate*? What is its significance?
11. What is your impression of the ending? How do you make sense of all the different occurrences during the final few pages? Do you think that it was a satisfactory conclusion?
12. Do you have a favourite recipe from the book? Is there a particular one that you want to eat or try to make yourself?
13. Have you seen the 1992 film adaptation (directed by Alfonso Arau, with a screenplay by Esquivel)? Did you like it? How does it compare to the novel?

Inspiration for some of the questions comes from LitLovers