

Violeta

by Isabel Allende

Martin County Library System Book Club Kit:

Violeta by Isabel Allende

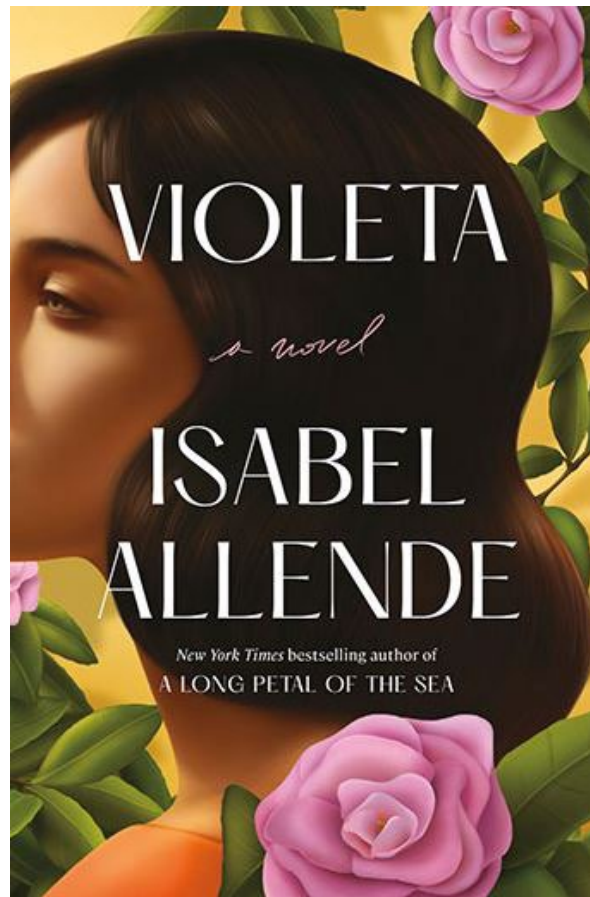
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Book summary

Violeta comes into the world on a stormy day in 1920, the first girl in a family of five boisterous sons. From the start, her life will be marked by extraordinary events, for the ripples of the Great War are still being felt, even as the Spanish flu arrives on the shores of her South American homeland almost at the moment of her birth.

Through her father's prescience, the family will come through that crisis unscathed, only to face a new one as the Great Depression transforms the genteel city life she has known. Her family loses all and is forced to retreat to a wild and beautiful but remote part of the country. There, she will come of age, and her first suitor will come calling. . . .



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She tells her story in the form of a letter to someone she loves above all others, recounting devastating heartbreak and passionate affairs, times of both poverty and wealth, terrible loss and immense joy. Her life will be shaped by some of the most important events of history: the fight for women's rights, the rise and fall of tyrants, and ultimately, not one but two pandemics.

Told through the eyes of a woman whose unforgettable passion, determination, and sense of humor will carry her through a lifetime of upheaval, Isabel Allende once more brings us an epic that is both fiercely inspiring and deeply emotional.

Source: Author's website. (isabelallende.com)



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Meet the Author

Isabel Allende—novelist, feminist, and philanthropist—is one of the most widely-read authors in the world, having sold more than 77 million books. Chilean born in Peru, Isabel won worldwide acclaim in 1982 with the publication of her first novel, *The House of Spirits*, which began as a letter to her dying grandfather. Since then, she has authored more than twenty-six bestselling and critically acclaimed books, including *Daughter of Fortune*, *Island Beneath the Sea*, *Paula*, *The Japanese Lover*, *A Long Petal of the Sea*, and her most recent memoir, *The Soul of a Woman*. Translated into more than forty-two languages, Allende’s works entertain and educate readers by interweaving imaginative stories with significant events.



In addition to her work as a writer, Allende devotes much of her time to human rights causes. In 1996, following the death of her daughter Paula, she established a charitable foundation in her honor, which has awarded grants to more than 100 nonprofits worldwide, delivering life-changing care to hundreds of thousands of women and girls. More than 8 million have watched her TED talks on leading a passionate life.

She has received fifteen honorary doctorates, including one from Harvard University, was inducted into the California Hall of Fame, received the PEN Center Lifetime Award, and the Anisfield-Wolf Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2014, President Barack Obama awarded Allende the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor, and in 2018 she received the Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters from the National Book Foundation. She lives in California.

Source: Author's website. (isabelallende.com)



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Discussion Questions

1. What did you think about Violeta as a character? How did she evolve throughout the course of the book? Which period of her life was the most interesting to you? Did you learn anything from her story?
2. Violeta tells her story in the form of a letter, a practice inspired by Isabel Allende's own correspondence with her mother, Panchita. Since Allende was 16, she and her mother would write letters almost daily when they were apart, each writing one half of a shared monologue that recorded their lives. What does the epistolary style add to the overall effect of the novel?
3. The novel is bookended by two pandemics. Did that timeline encourage you [to] examine what it means to live during and through such times more closely? What does it take to keep going when the world is filled with turmoil and unease?
4. Allende chooses to leave the country unnamed in *Violeta*, though scenes in the novel are inspired by historical events in the region and Allende's life—such as military coups and dictatorships, the 1918 flu pandemic, the Great Depression, the Women's Right movement, etc. Why do you think she made this choice? How did the open-ended setting impact your reading experience?
5. Violeta experiences different kinds and stages of love—expressed through family, security, passion, grief, kinship, tolerance, acceptance, and good humor. Discuss Violeta's various relationships. How does Allende capture the ways we love? In what ways does our capacity for love change over time?
6. Violeta says, "It was clear to me from a young age that although I respected them, my mother and my aunts were stuck in the past, uninterested in the outside world or anything that might challenge their beliefs." Discuss the ways different generations approach feminism.
7. *Violeta* is filled with playful, witty humor. What scenes or moments made you laugh? What does humor add to the overall effect of the story?



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8. Violeta's Aunt Pia observes, "Better a boring husband than an unreliable one." Do you agree? Do you think passion or loyalty is more important for a good marriage?
9. Memory is a major theme in this novel, made up of the unexpected events that make a life. Sometimes it's a blessing and sometimes it's a curse, as Violeta says. Discuss how the book explores memory.
10. In the last chapter, Allende writes, "There's a time to live and time to die. In between there's time to remember." How did this book make you reflect on your own life? What did you take away from reading it?

Source: Author's website. (isabelallende.com)



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Recipe suggestions

Dulce De Leche and Walnut Sponge Cake

For the Sponge Cake

- 6 oz. ground, toasted walnuts
- 1/2 cup white sugar
- 1/4 cup flour
- 4 eggs
- 1 egg yolk
- For the Meringue
- 3 egg whites
- 2 1/2 Tablespoons white sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Pinch of salt



To Decorate

- 24 oz. dulce de leche
- 2 cups chopped walnuts

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Prepare two 9-inch round baking tins by covering the bottom with a circle of wax paper. In a mixing bowl, whisk the eggs, the yolk and the sugar to ribbon stage. Fold in the flour and ground walnuts. Meanwhile, make the meringue by whisking the egg whites on high speed until fluffy. Add a pinch of salt and the vanilla. Change to low speed and sprinkle in the sugar. Whisk on high speed for 5 minutes until you obtain a firm, glossy meringue. Carefully add one-third of the meringue to the walnut and egg mixture. Slowly fold in the remaining two thirds to prevent the mixture from deflating.

Divide mixture between the prepared baking tins. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes until the cakes are dry to the touch and golden on the surface. Allow cakes to cool, then remove from the baking tins. Place a little dulce de leche on the plate where the cake will be assembled. Add the first sponge cake and cover with a layer of

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dulce de leche and sprinkle with chopped walnuts. Top with the second cake, then covering the whole cake with dulce de leche and walnuts. Allow to rest overnight.

Cafe Isabel

- 3/4 cup black coffee
- 1/3 cup milk (any kind)
- 1 Tablespoon of Khalua
- 1 scoop vanilla ice cream
- Ice
- Whipped Cream
- Additional sugar to taste (optional)

Pour the coffee in a tall glass, add some ice (up to 1/4 of the glass), add the milk and the Khalua, Stir once. Add the scoop of ice cream and garnish the top with whipped cream. You can also add a cherry or sprinkle cinnamon or chocolate powder.



Source: Isabel Allende Book Club Kit
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