

*Sobremesa: A Memoir of Food and Love in Thirteen Courses* Book Club Guide (with select answers from the author)

1. What is a family tradition you still practice or miss from your childhood?
2. What type of traditional foods were made for you growing up? Where did your families come from?
3. What do you think about the author's spiritual encounters with her family members?
4. Who was the author's Gentleman Caller (in the khaki windbreaker and cap)? What did he symbolize?
5. Have you ever started over in a new town, state or country? Can you relate to Josie's or Gastón's experiences?
6. We all face regret, especially when it comes to love. First love is a prevalent theme throughout the book. What is one thing you've always wanted to say to a past love but have never had the opportunity to do so? Do you have any lingering questions that haunt you?
7. The author talks about the amount of "firsts" she's botched throughout her lifetime. What are some of your most memorable firsts, and if you could, would you have a do-over of any of them?
8. In chapter six, the author mentions that one of the greatest lessons she learned from *Abuela* Dorita and her mom—along with her breakup with Tripp—was that women need other women more than they need men. Do you agree that? What do you think the author meant?
9. Josie and Gastón fall in love very quickly. What draws them together? Have you ever fallen in love so quickly? If not, do you think it's possible?
10. In the book's introduction, the author mentions how she grew up drinking the Kool-Aid that told women it's too late, or even too selfish, to change the course of their lives after the mid-thirties, even if they intuitively felt something was missing from them. Did this ring a bell for you? Have you ever felt that you've missed the boat on pursuing your true path?
11. The author's story is one of emotional eating—for the good and the bad. Explain the significance of food in her story. How does it affect each person's behavior?
12. Josie and Gastón forge their love over *milanesas* at a roadside gas station. Where is the most unexpected place you've had an unforgettable meal?
13. Dreams are a major theme of the author's story. They act as a portal for spiritual encounters and foreshadowing. Have you ever experienced a dream that was so real it was more like a visitation? Or one that you couldn't shake?
14. How do you feel about the memoir's stance on gender bias, political correctness and what *Vogue Magazine* refers to as "Malbec with a side of machismo?"
15. Out of all the recipes in the book, which do you connect with the most? Why?
16. The author talks about signs, how she believes they are everywhere and that people simply need to be open to seeing them. What signs does she encounter and how do they help her? Do you believe in signs?
17. "We're raising you to be a lady," is a phrase that the author's mom said often. What does it mean?
18. Did this book make you think differently about your own life and the things you value?
19. The author talks about how the connection *sobremesa* fosters reaches far beyond this world, as does the tragedy that can ensue when it is neglected. What does she mean?
20. If you had to describe *sobremesa* to someone, how would you explain it? Do you feel it deserves a space in the dictionary?

Select answers from the author:

#8. Sisterhood is just as important—even more important at times—than romantic, passionate love.

#11. Food frequently has the power of changing my mood and perspective, i.e., the mushroom sandwich. There is both heartache and comfort in that one simple sandwich. Or the Queen's crown that I bake in my apartment as I come to terms that my relationship with Gastón may be over. "The pie didn't come out as the shiny cookbook picture had promised. Didn't Gastón make promises to her that he'd since broken?" I was supposed to be his queen, or princess, as he called me. Likewise, food also has the ability to heal. The *sopa pastina*, for instance. Inevitably, cooking always reminds me of the matriarchs in my family, from whom I learned to cook with, eat with and *sobremesa* with.

#16. Some of my signs

1. Days before her passing: my mom stopping me in the market to make sure I know that she thinks I'm a great mother; the jewelry, her asking me to write down who gets what; Her telling me in that same scene that my dad is going to outlive her; her asking me to pray for her as I left that day; the peregrine falcon that flew up to my window at the office; my Gentleman Caller showing up at the office by my car beckoning me to go home; the Three Marias shooting stars I saw from the airplane that answered my prayer
2. Greatest of all—my premonition at Alfredo's grave three months prior.
3. Riley
4. The messages my mom sent me through balloons