

# THE BOOK OF LOST SAINTS

BY DANIEL JOSÉ OLDER  
DISCUSSION GUIDE

**ABOUT THE BOOK:** Marisol vanished during the Cuban Revolution, disappearing with hardly a trace. Now, shaped by atrocities long-forgotten, her tenacious spirit visits her nephew, Ramón, in modern-day New Jersey. Her hope: that her presence will prompt him to unearth their painful family history. Ramón launches a haphazard investigation into the story of his ancestor, unaware of the forces driving him on his search. Along the way, he falls in love, faces a run-in with a murderous gangster, and uncovers the lives of the lost saints who helped Marisol during her imprisonment.

1. Marisol initially struggles with understanding Ramón, but by the end of the book, she grows to love him as family. What events or realizations do you think bring about this shift in her feelings? How would some of your relatives (living or deceased) perceive your current life if they were with you every moment? Which relative(s) would you be happy to have with you? Which relative(s) would you never want to share your life with in this way?
2. Nilda chose to turn Marisol into the authorities. Can you sympathize with what she did and/or with her silence about it for so many years? Would you find it easy or difficult to forgive her as Marisol learned to do? Do you see any parallels to current events in the choice Nilda was faced with? If so, what are they?
3. Marisol urges Ramón to write down his dreams. What is the role of written history in the story? How does it compare to the role of oral history? What role do written and oral history play in your own family history?
4. What are some of the parallels you see between Marisol and Ramón's relationships to their family?

5. What role does music play in the book? What roles does music play in the lives of Marisol and Ramón? How are music and memories linked? What songs or types of music are associated with specific memories for you?

6. Marisol and Enrique both feel that the new generation needs to learn about Cuba's turbulent history. What are some similarities and differences between their views of that history? Do you see ways that Marisol's perspective might influence her decision to kill Enrique?

7. What drives Aliceana and Ramón apart and what then rekindles their relationship? Do you see any particular parallels between their relationship and Marisol's storyline?

8. Marisol eventually forgives Nilda and deems her one of the "lost saints." What other characters in the book would you consider "lost saints" in both Marisol and Ramón's life? Who do you consider "lost saints" in your life?

9. The relationship between trauma and healing are crucial to this novel. In what ways do each of the characters find their own ways of healing? How are they similar? How are they different?

10. How does family history affect our sense of self and identity? How do previous generations affect the next generation of a family?



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Daniel José Older is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the young adult series *The Shadowshaper Cypher*, the *Bone Street Rumba* urban fantasy series, the middle-grade historical fantasy series *Dactyl Hill Squad*, and *Star Wars: Last Shot*. He won the International Latino Book Award and has been nominated for the Kirkus Prize, the Mythopoeic Award, the Locus Award, the Andre Norton Award, and the World Fantasy Award. *Shadowshaper* was named one of *Esquire's* 80 Books Every Person Should Read. You can find his thoughts on writing, read dispatches from his decade-long career as an NYC paramedic, and hear his music on his website, YouTube and on Twitter.

@danieljose1  @djolder