

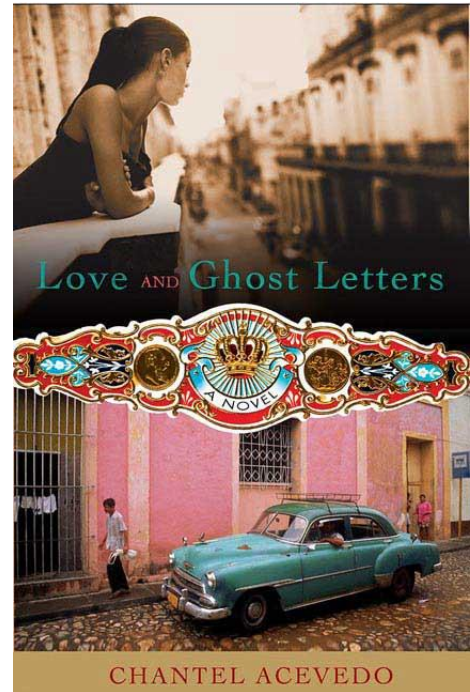
READING GROUP GUIDE

Love and Ghost Letters

By *Chantel Acevedo*

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Love and Ghost Letters* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Love and Ghost Letters*.

About the Book

On the outside, Josefina Navarro’s life seems fortunate enough—she lives with her father and her nursemaid, Regla, who raises her after the death of her mother in a luxurious home in Vedado, one of Cuba’s wealthiest districts. She attends society dances and is courted by all of Havana’s elite young bachelors. Enchanted by the rituals of her nursemaid, Josefina learns about the profound mysticism inherent in even the most mundane affairs. Though she is pampered, Josefina feels that her life is without passion or excitement. Her father, Sergeant Antonio Navarro, a Spaniard by birth, is a stern and demanding man whose past is a tightly kept secret.

When she meets and marries Lorenzo Concepción, a poor, reckless young man, the sergeant tells her, “So, you have chosen him...and you will be hungry and miserable all your life.” The couple moves to El Cotorro, a poverty-stricken town that is far removed from the Vedado plazas and carefully tended gardens Josefina knew. Lorenzo begins to leave her for months at a time,



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“looking for work,” but in reality, womanizing and carousing all over the island. Even after the birth of two healthy children, Josefina is not happy. This is not the life she had envisioned.

During a political maelstrom, history brings the sergeant to El Cotorro to quell a riot, where he is attacked and presumed dead. But perception is reality on an island in which darkness and light commingle, and magic and truth are one in the same.

When Josefina begins receiving letters from her father, she believes that what she holds are heaven’s missives, ghost letters. Through the letters, Josefina comes to know her father intimately, as a ghost and guardian, as he reveals the truth about his life. In the act of writing and reading, she has found a love to fill the empty places in her heart.

Set in Cuba and Miami, covering nearly fifty years of the island’s history, *LOVE AND GHOST LETTERS* unfolds the lives of the Navarro-Concepción families in the patterns and permutations of memory, and conjures a Cuban setting that evokes mysticism and magic.

About the Author

Chantel Acevedo is a first-generation Cuban-American whose childhood combined American modernity with traditional Cuban values. She attended the M.F.A. creative writing program at the University of Miami on a James Michener Fellowship. She has won two Fulbright Awards for secondary education.

Discussion Questions

1. The novel begins with a prophecy about Josefina’s life. Do you think it came true? What is the role of fate in the novel?
2. Though Josefina leaves the wealth of Vedado for the poverty of El Cotorro willingly, she still desires the luxuries of her youth. Why did she make that choice to begin with? How are issues of class dealt with in the novel?
3. Josefina is brought up Catholic, and her lover, Abel, forces her to attend Mass. Meanwhile, her nursemaid and adoptive mother, Regla, practices the Afro-Cuban religion of Santería. What does Josefina believe?
4. The book provides a portrait of Cuban life as it evolved in the 20th century. What are some of these changes? How must the Navarro-Concepción families adapt?
5. Why is the Sergeant so reluctant to talk about his past? What might it represent for him? Why do you think he chooses to reveal himself through letters?



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6. There are many men in Josefina's life—her father, the Sergeant, her husband, Lorenzo, Abel her lover, and her son, Lalo. What do they have in common?
7. What is Soledad's role in the novel? In what ways is she like her mother? Her grandfather?
8. Josefina ultimately manages to forgive Lorenzo's infidelities, and her father's and Abel's deception. Is this ability to forgive a sign of weakness or strength?
9. Why does Josefina burn her father's letters? What would you have done with them?

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