

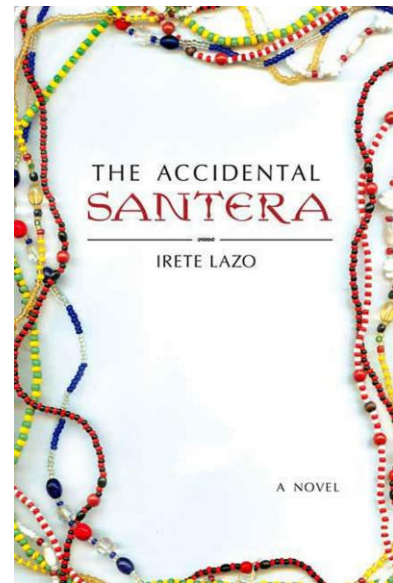
READING GROUP GUIDE

The Accidental Santera

By Irete Lazo

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Accidental Santera* 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 *The Accidental Santera*.

About the Book

A one-of-a-kind novel that plunges readers into the secrets of Afro-Cuban Santeria—a world of fascinating beauty, pulsating rhythms, and great mystery.

Gabrielle Segovia, Ph.D., is struggling to build a career as a Latina scientist, cope with her third miscarriage, and resuscitate her marriage to fellow biology professor Benito Cruz. Becoming a *santera* is not in her plans.

But everything changes when her best friend, the feisty Patricia Muñoz, drags her into a French Quarter voodoo shop during a conference in New Orleans. When Gabrielle gets home to the San Francisco Bay Area, the predictions from her on-a-whim reading begin to come true. That's when she learns she hails from a long line of practitioners of Santeria, the religion created when Yoruba slaves combined their ancient rituals with Catholicism.

Out of desperation to become a mother and save both her job and her marriage, Gabrielle turns to Puerto Rican relatives living in Miami she hasn't seen since she was a child. She finds herself warmly embraced by three generations of Segovia *santeras* and drawn into their world of séances, sacred drums, and ritual animal sacrifice.



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Unexpectedly marked for initiation by the gods and goddesses of the Yoruba pantheon, Gabrielle must decide whether she can bring herself to answer the call. And, if she chooses, commit to the seemingly contradictory life of a scientist who is also a *santera*.

In this powerful debut novel, Irete Lazo captures a vibrant world still unknown to many and relates a journey that is at once funny, heart-wrenching, and, ultimately, triumphant.

About the Author

Irete Lazo (a pseudonym) is a practicing *santera* and former scientist who received her Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. She has been a reporter at the *San Jose Mercury News*, an editor at *Latina* magazine, and a science correspondent for National Public Radio's *Latino USA*. She is currently a freelance science writer living with her husband and son in the San Francisco Bay Area. This is her first novel.

Discussion Questions

1. Is Gabrielle really an *accidental* santera and would she describe herself that way by the end of the novel?
2. What do you see as Gabrielle's motivation for telling her story?
3. How does Gabrielle's longing for acceptance play out among her relatives and with her colleagues?
4. How does the science vs. religion debate play out in Gabrielle's daily life? In her ultimate decision to become a santera? In your own life? In the world today?
5. What role does Gabrielle's identity as a Latina scientist play in her relationships with her husband Benito, her best friend Patri and her extended family?
6. Give examples of how Gabrielle is guilty of making assumptions, something she points out is a no-no for scientists. Did *The Accidental Santera* challenge any of your own assumptions?
7. What do you think Gabrielle's mantra "Forget what you know" really means to her?
8. How do Gabrielle and Patri handle being Latina scientists differently?
9. Gabrielle says people sometimes have to be pushed to the edge in order to take a leap of faith. What are the things that put her on that edge, both the ones she identifies and ones which she herself may not have been aware of? Do you have any experiences with taking a leap of faith? If so, did it involve that proverbial edge?



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10. Gabrielle learns through her student, Lila, that other cultures practice ancestor worship. What other practices in your family or in other world religions are similar to the ones described in *The Accidental Santera*.
11. This novel is about one woman's spiritual journey, but does Gabrielle find religion or re-discover her true spiritual nature?
12. Do you think science and religion are mutually exclusive?

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