



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE CEMETERY OF UNTOLD STORIES BY JULIA ALVAREZ

1. The characters who are "buried" in Alma's cemetery reveal parts of their lives that their "creator" didn't know about. What do you think that says about the role of a novelist and the limitations of a storyteller?
2. Consider these two lines from the novel: "We don't get free until we write our stories down" and "Some stories don't want to be told. Let them go." Can both statements be true? How so?
3. Some people waiting at the gate to Alma's cemetery are allowed in; others are not. What makes one storyteller gain access and another not? In our world, what does this say about whose stories get to be told? (Think of bestseller lists and school curriculum lists.) Whose stories are not getting told in Alma's cemetery?
4. The Latin American writer Eduardo Galeano once remarked, "Scientists say we are made up of atoms. But a little bird told me we are made up of stories." What are the stories that make you up? Are all of them stories you've told, or are some secret and untold? What would happen if you told them?
5. Alma's sisters learn that their father kept secrets from them-but they will never know the whole truth about those secrets. If they had discovered the truth, how do you think that would change their memories of their father? Is there someone in your life whose story dramatically changed for you? How did that affect your relationship?
6. How do you think the lives of the women in this novel were hurt by the men they loved?
7. Did you feel sympathy for Perla, and do you think her punishment was just?
8. Alma's pen name is Scheherazade. How is Alma's story both similar to and different from that legendary storyteller?
9. Does a story need an audience to be fully realized? And once it's told, who do you think "owns" it?
10. Do you think Alma was ever able to "escape" her characters? Do you think the creative life is ever over? Do you think we can ever bury the past?
11. Will Pepito write the stories that Alma couldn't? Will they be different stories?

Discussion questions provided by the author.



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