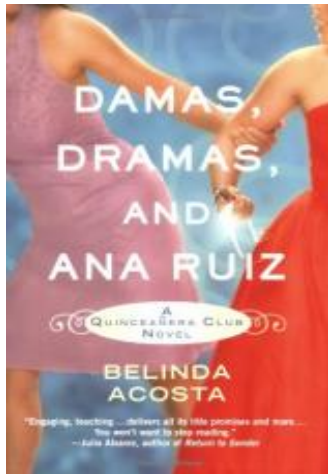


# Damas, Dramas, and Ana Ruiz

by Belinda Acosta

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## About the Book

All Ana Ruiz wanted was to have a traditional quinceañera for her daughter, Carmen. She wanted a nice way to mark this milestone year in her daughter's life. But Carmen was not interested in celebrating. Hurt and bitter over her father Esteban's departure, she blamed Ana for destroying their happy family, as did everyone else. A good man is hard to find, especially at your age Ana was told. Why not forgive his one indiscretion? Despite everything, Ana didn't want to tarnish Carmen's childlike devotion to her beloved father. But Ana knows that growing up sometimes means facing hard truths. In the end, Ana discovers that if she's going to teach Carmen anything about what it means to be a woman, it will take more than simply a fancy party to do it...

## Discussion Guide

1. Did you have a quinceañera, a sweet sixteen, or a bat mitzvah? What did it mean to you? To your loved ones?
2. Traditional quinceañeras have deep ties to Catholicism. How is religion treated in this novel? In your opinion, is it a good thing that traditionally religious celebrations (like the quinceañera) are becoming increasingly secular? Why?
3. There are several stereotypes that this novel plays with and ultimately diffuses. For example, Mocte describes Cynthia as "the white girl from Kansas." However, she is probably more familiar with Mexican folk music than any of the other characters in the novel, as she is in the mariachi band. Can you name some other stereotypes this novel entertains and then turns on their heads?
4. When Ana first meets Montalvo, she is obviously struck by his physical presence. Although she senses his interest in her, she does not allow herself to enter a relationship with him. What do you think of her reaction? Is it noble? Should Ana have been more responsive to his advances?

5. Do the young adults in the novel see the quinceañera as merely an opportunity to have a party, or do they attach greater significance to it?
6. What happened to Esteban and Ana's marriage? Was it just the indiscretion that drove them apart?
7. What do you think of Montalvo's self-absorption? Do you see it as a manifestation of the artist maintaining his autonomy, or a selfish and immature approach to life?
8. There are early clues that Montalvo may not be as wonderful as he seems. Can you name some of them? Were you surprised by his behavior when he revealed his ultimate plans to Ana?
9. Near the end of the novel, Beatriz asks Ana if the quinceañera is commemorating the death of a girl or the birth of a woman. What is your opinion?
10. Ana protected her children by not telling them the truth about their father. Her children continued to look up to Esteban and blamed Ana for the separation, and yet she still didn't tell them about Esteban's affair. Why do you think she did this?

## Author Bio

Belinda Acosta has written and published plays, short stories, and essays. As a journalist, her work has appeared in the *Austin American-Statesman*, *The Austin Chronicle*, the *San Antonio Express-News*, *The San Antonio Current*, and *AlterNet*. Her short story "Tortilla Dough" appeared in *Saguaro*, a publication of the University of Arizona in 1992. In 1993, she produced, directed and performed in a multi-media dance-theater performance of *La Llorona*. National exposure came in 1995 when she read her personal essay "Gran Baile," on *Latino USA - the Radio Journal of News and Culture*, carried on National Public Radio. Acosta received a Master of Fine Arts in Writing from The University of Texas in 1997. She lives in Austin, Texas and is the TV and media columnist for *The Austin Chronicle*.

## Critical Praise

"Belinda Acosta's **Damas, Dramas, and Ana Ruiz** delivers all its title promises and more: it's a book about damas of all ages, from teenage girls to the struggling mothers of those teenage girls; it's packed with drama so you don't want to stop reading; it's a novel that deeply and honestly tells the story of Ana Ruiz, her own coming of age as a woman and as a mother. Belinda Acosta is up to all of the challenges of such a rich panorama of characters and events. She's sassy, she's smart, she makes it look easy! But it takes a lot of hard work and a pile of talent to write such an engaging, touching book. A wonderful quinceañera of a novel!"

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