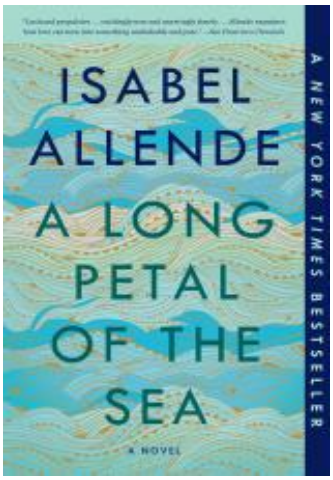
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A Long Petal of the Sea

by Isabel Allende



About the Book

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS, this epic novel spanning decades and crossing continents follows two young people as they flee the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War in search of a place to call home.

In the late 1930s, civil war grips Spain. When General Franco and his Fascists succeed in overthrowing the government, hundreds of thousands are forced to flee in a treacherous journey over the mountains to the French border. Among them is Roser, a pregnant young widow, who finds her life intertwined with that of Victor Dalmau, an army doctor and the brother of her deceased love. In order to survive, the two must unite in a marriage neither of them desires.

Together with 2,000 other refugees, they embark on the SS *Winnipeg*, a ship chartered by the poet Pablo Neruda, to Chile: ?the long petal of sea and wine and snow.? As unlikely partners, they embrace exile as the rest of Europe erupts in world war. Starting over on a new continent, their trials are just beginning, and over the course of their lives, they will face trial after trial. But they also will find joy as they patiently await the day when they will be exiles no more. Through it all, their hope of returning to Spain keeps them going. Destined to witness the battle between freedom and repression as it plays out across the world, Roser and Victor will find that home might have been closer than they thought all along.

A masterful work of historical fiction about hope, exile and belonging, A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA shows Isabel Allende at the height of her powers.

Discussion Guide

1. Each chapter begins with a quote from Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. How do those quotes frame the chapters? Was there a particular quote you liked best? Did your attention to these quotes change when Neruda became a character in the novel?

2. Discuss the significance of the title, A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA. What do you think it means?

3. Which character did you feel most drawn to, and why?

4. One page 41, Allende writes, ?Despite this, the American officer still believed in the triumph of socialism. To him, equality was not only possible, but inevitable, and he practiced it like a religion.? How are ideals like socialism and equality represented in this novel? What other big concepts are examined?

5. What were your first impressions of Victor Dalmau and Roser Bruguera? How did your impressions change as the characters themselves transformed throughout the course of the novel?

6. When first asking Roser to marry him in order to secure a spot on the ship ferrying refugees to Chile, Victor asks if affection and respect can be enough for her. Do you think those two feelings are enough for any relationship, whether platonic or romantic? In what circumstances?

7. In the beginning of A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA, Allende writes about the many thousands of terrified refugees escaping to France, where a campaign of fear and hatred awaited them, about how nobody wanted these ?filthy fugitives? or ?repugnant beings who were going to spread epidemics, commit robberies and rape, and stir up a communist revolution.? Do you think those same sentiments towards refugees exist today? Why do you think refugees are so often stigmatized in history and in present day?

8. Each of the main characters experiences love at some point in the story --- Roser, Guillem, Victor, Ofelia, etc. What did you think of their different love stories? Which did you find the most realistic, the most heartbreaking or the most compelling? In what ways does love drive the plot of the book?

9. What role do politics play in this novel? How does Allende use conversations between characters --- like Juana, Felipe and Isidro --- to portray the tumultuous political climate during this time period? Why do you think these characters had different political opinions? Do you think different generations are destined to have conflicting opinions?

10. What do you think of Ofelia?s storyline? How did you feel about her decision to keep the baby and her family?s deception in telling her it died during childbirth? How was her life shaped by the decisions of men, from her father to her eventual husband Matias? What would have happened to her if Matias hadn?t married her?

11. How did you feel about the ending of A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA? Was it what you expected, what you hoped would happen? If not, how would you have constructed the ending?

12. What did you learn from reading A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA --- about this period in history, about Chilean culture or about human nature?

Author Bio

Isabel Allende, born in Peru and raised in Chile, is a novelist, feminist and philanthropist. She is one of the most widely read authors in the world, having sold more than 80 million copies of her books across 42 languages. She is the author of several bestselling and critically acclaimed books, including MY NAME IS EMILIA DEL VALLE, THE WIND KNOWS MY NAME, VIOLETA, A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA, THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS, OF LOVE AND SHADOWS, EVA LUNA and PAULA.

In addition to her work as a writer, Isabel devotes much of her time to human rights causes. She has received 15 honorary doctorates, been inducted into the California Hall of Fame, and received the PEN Center Lifetime Achievement Award and the Anisfield-Wolf Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2014, President Barack Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation?s highest civilian honor, and in 2018, she received the Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters from the National Book Foundation. She lives in California with her husband and dogs.

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