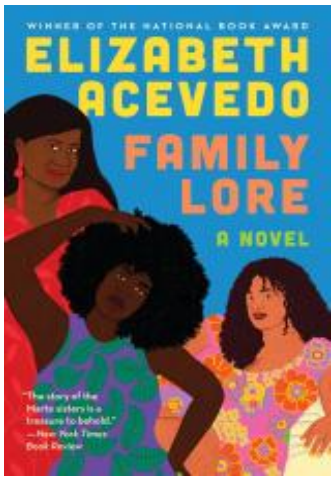
Family Lore

by Elizabeth Acevedo



About the Book

From the bestselling, National Book Award?winning author Elizabeth Acevedo comes her first novel for adults, the story of one Dominican-American family told through the voices of its women as they await a gathering that will forever change their lives.

Flor has a gift: she can predict, to the day, when someone will die. So when she decides she wants a living wake --- a party to bring her family and community together to celebrate the long life she?s led --- her sisters are surprised. Has Flor foreseen her own death, or someone else?s? Does she have other motives? She refuses to tell her sisters: Matilde, Pastora and Camila.

But Flor isn?t the only person with secrets: her sisters are hiding things, too. And the next generation, cousins Ona and Yadi, face tumult of their own.

Spanning the three days prior to the wake, FAMILY LORE traces the lives of each of the Marte women, weaving together past and present, Santo Domingo and New York City. Told with Elizabeth Acevedo?s inimitable and incandescent voice, this is an indelible portrait of sisters and cousins, aunts and nieces --- one family?s journey through their history, helping them better navigate all that is to come.

Discussion Guide

1. Each of the sisters and nieces in FAMILY LORE possesses a gift, with Flor?s gift at the center of the novel. If she dreams about teeth shattering, has terrible jaw pain, or her own teeth chatter, she knows when someone will die. What lore or gifts have been passed down in your family? What are your thoughts on them?

2. FAMILY LORE alternates between the Marte women?s six distinct voices throughout the story, with chapters

highlighting Matilde, Flor, Pastora, Camila, Ona and Yadi. What traits about each sister are similar and different, and how does this affect their decision-making throughout the novel?

3. FAMILY LORE weaves the past and the present, taking us from Santo Domingo and New York City over the course of three days and also 70 years. What differences do you notice between the first generation and the second generation women in the text?

4. What roles do family land, herbalism and natural food/ingredients play in this novel?

5. Each Marte woman has a different relationship with Santo Domingo: Yadi misses home, while Pastora was traumatized by home. Discuss each sister?s relationship to her ancestral land and how this plays out throughout the story.

6. Discuss the role of matriarchs in the Marte family and compare this to your own family. What similarities and differences do you spot?

7. Now compare the Marte matriarchs to their partners. What roles do these men play in uplifting and also disparaging their spouses?

8. ?I was not born with a gift, and I never developed one in the ways of my sisters, whose uncanny senses of the world came from beyond. I cobbled together my own gift. Claimed magic where I?d be told none could exist. That is what dancing was for me. And it is as powerful as any second sight or inclination toward healing.? Matilde is said to be the sister who ?was not born with a gift? but ?cobbled together? her own. Do you feel her dancing could be considered just as much of a gift as the other Marte sisters? gifts?

9. This book uses folk tradition to incorporate magical realism in the text. ?My mother?s magic...is not an orderly system like how fantasy novels can describe the exact structure of where and whence and thusly. The women in my family get struck by an unknown lightning rod.? What parts of it felt real to you? All of it? Some of it? Now compare this to your own cultural traditions. Are there similar elements?

10. Soraya encourages Ona to research her own bloodline, yet Ona collects her family stories with no real intention of using them. What do you think Ona?s research is motivated by, then? What are some creative ways Ona could turn her family?s lore into something shareable? If you were in Ona?s profession, how would you showcase your family history?

11. Throughout the text, Ona sprinkles in historical facts about the Latin Kings, Dominicans being descendants of Taino people, Christopher Columbus, and the 1521 slave rebellion at the sugarcane estate of Diego Colón. Did you learn about this history growing up? If so, where did you learn? If not, consider using this time to research these events and discuss within your group.

12. This novel shows different forms of self-care --- Flor locking herself in the bathroom to lie in the tub and imitate the meditation she saw on television or putting on a mud mask once a week, and Ona going to therapy. How do the boundary and self-care practices and rituals mother and daughter exhibit change across generations, and how do they influence one another?

13. Do you relate to any of the characters? If so, which character best represents you and why?

14. The snake dream is a significant omen in this story. Discuss what it means and its importance.

15. Flor gives a compelling speech about her life at the end of FAMILY LORE, which raises the question of how we want to spend our lives. What does it mean to live well and die well? What kind of life do you want to live so that you can be okay about coming to terms with your own death?

Author Bio

Elizabeth Acevedo is the *New York Times* bestselling author of FAMILY LORE, her first novel for adults, and THE POET X, which won the National Book Award for Young People?s Literature, the Michael L. Printz Award, the Pura Belpré Award, the Carnegie medal, the *Boston Globe*?Horn Book Award, and the Walter Award. She is also the author of WITH THE FIRE ON HIGH --- which was named a best book of the year by the New York Public Library, NPR, *Publishers Weekly* and *School Library Journal* --- and CLAP WHEN YOU LAND, which was a *Boston Globe*?Horn Book Honor book and a Kirkus finalist.

She holds a BA in Performing Arts from The George Washington University and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Maryland. Acevedo has been a fellow of Cave Canem, Cantomundo, and a participant in the Callaloo Writer?s Workshops. She is a National Poetry Slam Champion and resides in Washington, DC with her loves.

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Publication Date: May 28, 2024
Genres: Fiction, Women's Fiction
Paperback: 400 pages
Publisher: Ecco
ISBN-10: 0063207273
ISBN-13: 9780063207271