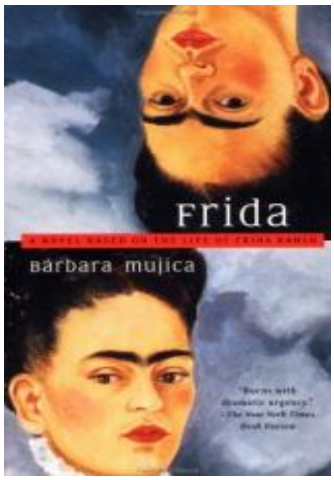
Frida

by Bárbara Mujica



About the Book

Frida is a fictional biography of Frida Kahlo, the legendary Mexican artist known for her surreal self-portraits. The book, told by her younger sister, Cristina, gives us an intimate, adoring and envious look at the passionate, talented and tormented woman behind the canvases.

Suffering from polio as a child and a crippling accident as a teenager, Frida's life was riddled with pain. Various treatments only increased her suffering. She often was confined to her bed, where she sometimes had to use a mirror to paint.

Her marriage to Diego Rivera, the muralist, was tumultuous. His affairs with women would drive Frida to have her own affairs with both men and women. However, she would view Diego's affair with her sister Cristina as the ultimate betrayal, the greatest hurt. Behind a backdrop of great drama, a constant parade of Mexican politicians and international artists shared the stage with Frida. The parties, soirees and political gatherings were charged with excitement, fervor and even political violence. By using Cristina to tell Frida's story, Barbara Mujica shows us what it's like to live in the shadow of celebrity -- the woman who attends the party as a guest, not the star.

In the end, even as Frida spiraled downward into a haze of alcohol and drugs, it was Cristina that was always there for her. While cancer ultimately killed Frida, her wild life also played a part in her death at the age of 44.

Readers will explore Frida with this book, and for many it will be as one reviewer said - "a captivating introduction to the life -- and death of Frida Kahlo." (Grand Rapids Press)

Discussion Guide

1. "Sometimes I feel as though I've lived my entire life through Frida. She was the one who had adventures; she was the

one who experienced magnificent emotions. I wore life secondhand, just as I wore Frida's old clothes....Sometimes, even when they're close, sisters go through life independently, each reaching toward her own destiny. But not in my case. The simple truth is, without Frida, there is no Cristi. (Page 136) Explore the relationship between Frida and Cristina, especially in relation to Christina's need to be a part of Frida's world.

2. "Frida had a kind of....almost...a sickness. Or maybe obsession would be a better world. She always had to be at the center of everything. Everyone had to be looking at her. She wanted to be different, and she was different, but it was strange. (Pg 107) Discuss Frida's obsession with being different and how this affects her art and her life.

3. Explore the issue of sibling rivalry. Is there a rivalry between Frida and Cristina, as well as dependence? Think about how Cristina opens the book talking about herself. "She had her strong points and I had mine. She was clever. I was beautiful. She wasn't beautiful." Cristina wants readers to know that she was more attractive to Diego than Frida --- that she was his favorite model. Why do you think that she does this?

4. Discuss Frida's obsession with death and the symbolism of death throughout the book. "All during her life, Frida found death attractive, alluring. Even when we were very young, when she still found it frightening, even then, death fascinated her. (See page 161)

5. Discuss the relationship between Frida and Diego. Do you think that the volatility of their passion fueled their art? Do you think that Cristina betrays Frida and has an affair with Diego to prove something to her after years of living in her shadow? What do you feel that Frida's obsession with creating self-portraits said about her?

6. There is a theme of loss and longing throughout the book; Frida is childless. Why do you think that Frida reacts so viciously when the children in the art class come to honor her for Mother's Day? Do you think that this opens the wound of her motherless state? Discuss this in relation to Frida destroying her doll collection. Was she killing the dolls as an extension of herself, or killing them as they represented a dream of babies in the future? How do you think Frida's physical pain influenced her life and her work?

7. Explore Frida and Diego's commitment to Communism. Do you feel that they embraced Communism as a true calling, or a socially chic issue?

8. After the unattractive physical description of Diego Rivera (Page 108), what you think attracted both Frida and Cristina to him? Besides being highly sexual, do you feel there was love between these people? Was there intimacy? Or was it merely a physical act? Are you drawn to read and learn more about Frida after reading this book? Does reading this book make you want to view her work? Do you feel this work will have more meaning to you after reading this book?

9. Meeting Note: It may be nice to have someone bring photos of some of Frida's paintings to the meeting to enhance the experience of talking about the book.

Author Bio

Bárbara Mujica is the bestselling author of four novels, including FRIDA, which was translated into 17 languages. She is

also an award-winning short story writer and essayist whose work has been published in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Miami Herald*, among others. A professor emerita of Spanish at Georgetown University, she lives in Bethesda, Maryland.

Critical Praise

"Mujica's Frida is a brave, foul-mouthed child, simultaneously defiant and winning."

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