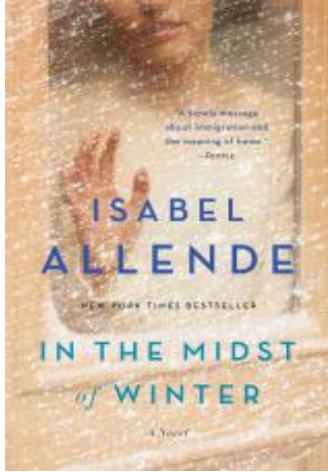


# In the Midst of Winter

by Isabel Allende

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## About the Book

*New York Times* and worldwide bestselling author Isabel Allende returns with a sweeping novel that journeys from present-day Brooklyn to Guatemala in the recent past to 1970s Chile and Brazil.

An instant *New York Times* bestseller, *IN THE MIDST OF WINTER* is about three very different people who are brought together in a mesmerizing story that offers "a timely message about immigration and the meaning of home" (*People*).

During the biggest Brooklyn snowstorm in living memory, Richard Bowmaster, a lonely university professor in his 60s, hits the car of Evelyn Ortega, a young undocumented immigrant from Guatemala, and what at first seems an inconvenience takes a more serious turn when Evelyn comes to his house, seeking help. At a loss, the professor asks his tenant, Lucia Maraz, a fellow academic from Chile, for her advice.

As these three lives intertwine, each will discover truths about how they have been shaped by the tragedies they witnessed, and Richard and Lucia will find unexpected, long-overdue love. Allende returns here to themes that have propelled some of her finest work: political injustice, the art of survival, and the essential nature of --- and our need for --- love.

## Discussion Guide

1. Each of the three main characters --- Lucia, Evelyn and Richard --- experiences some kind of isolation in their present life. The book begins with Lucia physically isolated in her apartment during a snowstorm. In what other ways is she isolated? How is her isolation different from Evelyn's? And from Richard's?
2. Evelyn comes to the United States as a refugee fleeing violence. Compare her experience entering the country with

that of other immigrants you know of or have read about. Why did they leave their native countries, and what were their first experiences as immigrants? Did you find any aspects of Evelyn's journey surprising? It is said that the United States is a country of immigrants, and that immigrants made this country great. Do you agree? Why or why not? Did this book change the way you think about immigrants? If so, how?

**3.** Many immigrants in the United States currently work in caretaker jobs: as nannies taking care of small children, or as home health aides caring for the sick, elderly, or dying. Do you know of any immigrants in these kinds of jobs? Do they encounter any difficulties similar to Evelyn's? How do Frankie's parents treat Evelyn? Why does she seem "invisible" to Frankie's father?

**4.** Evelyn's relationship with Frankie is very special, and reveals a lot about her character. Why is she so successful at caring for him? In what ways does she expand his horizons? Do you know of someone who works with people who are physically, mentally, or emotionally challenged? Do they share any of Evelyn's character traits?

**5.** When Evelyn leaves her native village, she tells her grandmother Concepcion, "Just as I am going, Grandma, so I will return." Compare Evelyn's relationship with her grandmother to her relationship with her mother, Miriam. What positive things has each of them given to Evelyn?

**6.** Lucia loses her brother during the political turmoil in Chile during the early 1970s and is forced to flee the country, eventually becoming an exile in Canada. What qualities does she have that help her face her life as an exile? Do you know of anyone who is an exile? What special difficulties do they share? How do the challenges of Lucia's exile compare with Evelyn's challenges as a refugee?

**7.** People and animals share their lives. Compare the companionship between Richard and the four cats and between Lucia and Marcelo. How do their interactions reflect each of their personalities?

**8.** Richard and his wife, Anita, go through the devastating experience of losing their baby son. How do their reactions to this tragedy differ? And how do these differences ultimately determine the fate of Bibi and of their marriage?

**9.** Anita's family has always been very tight-knit, giving her a sense of well-being and support. How does this compare with Richard's upbringing? He comes to resent Anita's family after the tragedy. Why do you think this is so? Is he fair in resenting their efforts?

**10.** When Richard arrives in New York with Anita, and his friend Horacio sees the state she is in, he says to Richard, "Make sure you don't let her down, brother." In what ways does Richard end up letting Anita down? Why do you think he does? How does the fate of Anita and his children continue to shape his life long after their deaths?

**11.** There is often a conflict between "the letter of the law," which refers to a literal interpretation of the words, and "the spirit of the law," which refers to the intention behind the law. At the end of the book, Lucia tells Richard, "The law is cruel and justice is blind. Kathryn Brown helped us tilt the balance slightly in favor of natural justice, because we were protecting Evelyn, and now we have to do the same for Cheryl." Do you agree with Lucia's decision? Why or why not? If you were in a situation similar to Lucia's, how do you think you would handle it?

**12.** Each of the main characters is a stranger to the people around her/him. In what way is Evelyn a stranger to the family

she works for? Lucia is of course a foreigner in New York, but even as a colleague of Richard's at NYU she remains a stranger to him, just as he is to her. Why do you think that is? In what ways do they misinterpret each other? To what extent do Evelyn, Lucia and Richard each become less of a stranger by the end of the book?

**13.** Our protagonists each deal with trauma in their own way: Lucia with an open heart and taking risks; Evelyn by hiding, being silent, and trying to make herself invisible; and Richard by closing down and protecting himself. They have all experienced events that could have utterly destroyed them. Identify what these are for each character and compare how they each handled those events. In what ways did they succeed in overcoming the trauma of their past? In what ways do they still carry it with them?

**14.** Lucia and Richard find love at a mature age. At first, they believed they were too old to find love, before realizing that they came together at exactly the right time. Is there an age limit for certain life experiences like falling in love? How has the process and concept of aging changed today when compared to the previous generation? Consider how the timeline has shifted for younger generations with regards to traditional milestones of earning a higher degree, building a career, getting married, owning a home, and starting a family, etc.

**15.** "In the midst of winter, I finally found there was within me an invincible summer." Why do you think Isabel Allende chose to include this quote from Albert Camus in the book's epigraph, title and final scene? Most of the story literally takes place during the winter. But on the symbolic level, Evelyn, Lucia and Richard are all experiencing a winter of the spirit. What does that consist of, for each of them? And what do you think the "invincible summer" is that each one finds within?

## 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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