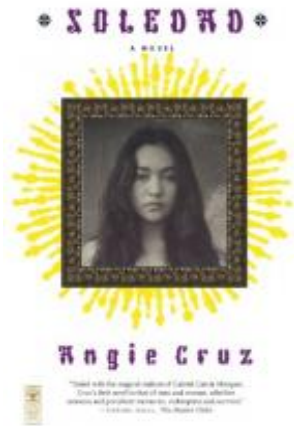


# Soledad

by Angie Cruz

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## About the Book

At eighteen, Soledad couldn't get away fast enough from her contentious family with their endless tragedies and petty fights. Two years later, she's an art student at Cooper Union with a gallery job and a hip East Village walk-up. But when Tía Gorda calls with the news that Soledad's mother has lapsed into an emotional coma, she insists that Soledad's return is the only cure. Fighting the memories of open hydrants, leering men, and slick-skinned teen girls with raunchy mouths and snapping gum, Soledad moves home to West 164th Street. As she tries to tame her cousin Flaca's raucous behavior and to resist falling for Richie -- a soulful, intense man from the neighborhood -- she also faces the greatest challenge of her life: confronting the ghosts from her mother's past and salvaging their damaged relationship.

Evocative and wise, **Soledad** is a wondrous story of culture and chaos, family and integrity, myth and mysticism, from a Latina literary light.

## Discussion Guide

1. What reasons does Soledad give for wanting to be far away from her family? Do you think there are other reasons that she's not fully aware of? How legitimate are these reasons, and do you think her feelings about them change over the course of the book?
2. Flaca and Soledad seem to have switched mothers in certain essential ways. At what point in their childhood did this happen? What event or series of events triggered it? Why would each of them find it easier to be close to their aunt than to their mother? Have you ever been particularly close to a member of your extended family? What was uniquely beneficial about the relationship?
3. What role does the supernatural play in the book? Which characters see things that may or may not really exist, and why do you think they see these things? Which characters believe most strongly in the spirit world? When the men from

Olivia's past appear in the room, what allows Soledad to see them? What does she learn from their presence?

4. The chronology of the book often skips from the present day to an incident from the distant past. How does this back-and-forth technique help you to see the characters develop? How does it affect the way you view the different generations of the family? Does it help you better understand the similarities and differences between the generations? If so, how?

5. What type of information do characters divulge to Olivia that they might not divulge if they thought that she was fully conscious? What kind of behaviors do they exhibit? How do their conversations with, and actions around, Olivia move the story along?

6. Were you surprised by the revelation about Manolo's death? Do you think that Soledad remembered this incident all along, or was her memory jogged by something that happened in the present day? What led Olivia to act the way she did in that fateful moment, and was she at all justified in her action?

7. How does Olivia's memory of her relationship with Manolo influence the way she advises Soledad and Flaca to deal with men? What role do you think Manolo played in the affliction that plagues Olivia throughout the book?

8. Why does Soledad fall for Richie? Is it a slow process, or does one particular moment alter her feelings for good? In what ways is Richie different from the other men in Soledad's life, and how is he similar?

9. How do the male characters in the book deal with the influence of their ancestors' behavior? How is it different from the way the females cope with theirs?

10. In what ways is Flaca old beyond her years, and in what ways is she naive? How are other characters defined by their relationship to her? Did you ever find yourself taking Flaca's side in her frequent disputes with Soledad? If so, why?

11. Discuss how the supporting characters enrich the story: What do you learn from the presence of Soledad's grandparents? What does Ciego's blindness represent to you? When Toe-knee is arrested and Flaca must briefly take care of Iluminada, what does the incident tell you about the characters involved, and the world in which they live?

12. Near the end of the book, Soledad observes that her family thinks of Washington Heights as a temporary home, until the time comes when they can return to the Dominican Republic. Do you think this is true of everyone in the family? Who might not feel this way, and why?

13. Now that Olivia has started speaking again, how do you think the lives of the characters will change in the future? Will they return to New York? Will Soledad stay home or go back to the East Village? Will she be interested in maintaining her romantic relationship with Richie? Taking up where the book leaves off, discuss why the characters may or may not embrace drastic change in the next chapter of their lives.

## **Author Bio**

Angie Cruz is the author of the novels *HOW NOT TO DROWN IN A GLASS OF WATER*, *SOLEDAD*, *LET IT RAIN COFFEE* and *DOMINICANA*, which was shortlisted for the Women's Prize and a Good Morning America Book Club

pick. She is founder and editor in chief of *Aster(ix)*, a literary and arts journal, and is an associate professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh.

## Critical Praise

. "A vivid, breathing cityscape teeming with raw beauty, danger, and magic.."

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