

Book Group Guide

1. In this memoir, what is the meaning of “home”? How do Ana’s perceptions of home change, or not, over the course of the book?
2. Like most refugee families, Ana’s family can’t return home, and they depend on letters and phone calls to stay connected to loved ones who stayed behind. How does this forced and potentially permanent separation shape the family’s view of the past—and the future?
3. Mami decides early on that the revolution is turning into a worse dictatorship than Batista’s and that the family must flee. Abuela, Tía, and Tío wrestle with moral dilemmas before they arrive at the same conclusion. Tío Manolo’s family decides to wait things out and ends up enduring decades of hardship. If faced with an existential challenge, would you be more likely to decide and act quickly or to wait things out?
4. Abuela has an especially difficult transition to America, but so does Papi. How do they each manage their transitions? How does his former baseball career help Papi in America? Is their transition different from Ana’s?

5. Ana is uncomfortable with her Cuban culture as a young person, even as she celebrates much of it. How does she come to terms with her hyphenate identity? Should refugees and immigrants have hyphenate identities, or is it better to simply call themselves Americans?
6. Later in life, Ana reluctantly accepts that she has been through significant trauma and must deal with the ramifications. How is Ana's trauma different from her grandmother's? Is the sudden uprooting of families a trauma that ever heals?
7. What family stories/myths/history keep the family going through relocation and change? Why are the distortions in some of those stories both helpful and problematic for Ana?
8. How do religion and spirituality help Abuela confront her new reality? How do they help the rest of the family?
9. Ana and Abuela share a unique and powerful bond. The old and the very young in refugee and immigrant homes are often overshadowed by the adults busy making all the decisions, working multiple jobs, and learning the new rules of the game. Could the bond between the "bookend" generations be an overlooked hallmark of the refugee and immigrant experience?
10. This memoir celebrates women family members in particular. How and why does Ana choose to highlight them? Which characters stayed with you? Why?
11. What if Abuela had stayed in Cuba, as she wanted, to care for Don Manuel? How did choosing her daughters over her father affect the family's chance of success in the United States?
12. What surprised you most about this refugee household? About the refugee experience?

13. How does returning to Cuba to visit the family and friends they'd left behind help Ana and her family? Why is Papi so vehemently opposed to their trip back? Who is right?
14. When she becomes a mother, Ana tries to follow Cuban tradition and it doesn't work. How does becoming a mother change her perspective toward her culture? Herself? The idea of family?
15. In one of his last letters, Don Manuel urges his daughter and granddaughters to "stay together." Do the sisters fulfill that wish, even though they move into separate homes later in life?