



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

Dominicana

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Dominicana*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *Dominicana*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. When Ana first comes to America, Juan buys her a ceramic doll at the airport: “She wears a blue dress and a yellow sash around her waist. My sweet, hollow Dominicana will keep all my secrets: she has no eyes, no lips, no mouth.” What does that doll represent in the novel, specifically about Ana’s relationship with Juan?
2. *Dominicana* is set in 1965, the year the United States occupied Dominican Republic, Malcolm X was shot in Washington Heights, the World’s Fair came to Queens, and Dominican baseball players made the national news. How do these historical events directly influence the lives of the Canción and Ruiz families?
3. What particular challenges does Ana face as an immigrant? What about the challenges for Juan? César? What resonance does their story have in our current political moment? What differences would they face if they were immigrants in New York City today?
4. Family is extremely important to both Juan and Ana. How are their lives shaped by familial duty and expectation? What do they each sacrifice for their families?
5. Ana calls Juan “my monster and my angel.” What does she mean? How is domestic violence portrayed in this novel?
6. The novel is told primarily from Ana’s first-person narration, but occasionally we see Juan’s point of view, most intimately in his letters to Caridad. What does his perspective add to the story? Did it help you feel sympathy toward him?
7. Ana has very complicated relationships with Marisela and Caridad. Contrast these three women: What do they have in common, and how are they different? What particular challenges do they face as immigrant women? Do you think their behavior toward Ana is justifiable?
8. Discuss Mamá’s role in arranging Ana’s marriage to Juan. Even if she had her daughter’s best interests at heart, do you think she did the right thing? Ana then becomes a mother herself. How is motherhood portrayed in the novel?

9. Ana absorbs lessons on marriage from her mother's stories, pop culture (*I Love Lucy* and telenovelas), politics (Jackie Kennedy's speeches), and more. How does Ana view her role as a wife, and how does it shift over the course of the novel?
10. Discuss Ana's relationships with Juan and César. What does each brother offer, and what are their drawbacks? Do you think Ana made the right decision in letting César go?
11. New York City itself becomes a sort of character in this novel, with scenes set at the Audubon Ballroom, the Queens' World's Fair, the beach at Coney Island, and beyond. What is the influence of the city on Ana's life? What was your favorite scene among her urban adventures?
12. Race is very much on the characters' minds in this novel, from the importance of Dominican baseball players to Juan and his brothers (and how their skin color changes the way they are perceived in the city); to the tensions with Hector's Puerto Rican wife, Yrene; to Ana's relationships with her neighbors in their building; to Juan's distrust of the African Americans in Washington Heights. Discuss the contrasting forces of assimilation and cultural identity that shape the characters' lives.
13. *Dominicana* is in many ways Ana's coming-of-age story. Does Ana remind you of any women in your own life or family? How does she change and grow over these pages? What do you think her future holds?