

BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT

THE VOLCANO DAUGHTERS

GINA MARÍA BALIBRERA



2025 BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY
BOOK PRIZE FINALIST

Bklyn
Public Library

BOOK SYNOPSIS

El Salvador, 1923. Graciela, a young girl growing up on a volcano in a community of Indigenous women, is summoned to the capital, where she is claimed as an oracle for a rising dictator. There she meets Consuelo, the sister she has never known, who was stolen from their home before Graciela was born. The two spend years under the cruel El Gran Pendejo's regime, unwillingly helping his reign of terror, until genocide strikes the community from which they hail. Each believing the other to be dead, they escape, fleeing across the globe, reinventing themselves until fate ultimately brings them back together in the most unlikely of ways...

Endlessly surprising, vividly imaginative, bursting with lush life, *The Volcano Daughters* charts a new history and mythology of El Salvador, fiercely bringing forth voices that have been calling out for generations.

AUTHOR BIO: GINA MARÍA BALIBRERA

GINA MARÍA BALIBRERA earned an MFA in Prose from the University of Michigan's Helen Zell Writers' Program. She's been awarded grants from Aspen Words, Tin House, the Rackham Foundation, and the Periplus Collective, as well as a Tyson Award, the Aura Estrada Prize, and the Under the Volcano Sandra Cisneros Fellowship.



Photo: © Charles Amyx



LEARN MORE ABOUT BALIBRERA AT GINAMARIABALIBRERA.COM AND IN SELECT MEDIA INTERVIEWS:

- **NEW YORK TIMES – Two Sisters Take On the 20th Century, With Ghosts in Tow**
- **PUBLIC BOOKS – 'We Are Not Meant to Be Girls Alone in this World': A Conversation with Gina María Balibrera**
- **GREEN APPLE BOOKS – Gina María Balibrera with Lauren Markham: *The Volcano Daughters***
- **DEBUTIFUL PODCAST – Gina María Balibrera Discusses Her Debut Novel *The Volcano Daughters***

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS!

- 1** *The Volcano Daughters* is narrated by ghosts, who introduce themselves to readers in the Prologue. How does this style of narration affect the telling of the story? How does having their perspective as a collective group of spirits change your understanding of and relationship to the events of the novel?
- 2** On page 11, Balibrera writes: “Stories all have masters who control how they’re told and to whom.” How does that theme play out in this book? Who controls this story, and does that change as the novel progresses? Do their stories change depending on who they’re sharing them with?
- 3** The book weaves Spanish-language words into the predominantly English text. How does that interplay of languages enrich the voice or narration of the story? What does it add that might not be present if the book were solely in English?
- 4** Graciela is perceived in the capital as a representation of the ideal future of El Salvador, in large part because of her skin color. How does colorism play a role in this novel? Who benefits from the color of their skin, and who is harmed for it? Does that shift as the novel progresses and the characters move from El Salvador to the United States and France?

THESE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WERE CREATED BY THE PUBLISHER PANTHEON AND ARE NOT AFFILIATED WITH BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY.

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS!

- 5** *The Volcano Daughters* has often been described as a work of magical realism. What “magical” elements do you see in this story? What role do they play in the narrative and how do they interplay with its “realism”? Are there aspects of the book that are drawn directly from realist history that feel as surreal as the mythological or magical parts?
- 6** When Graciela is taken to the capital, she’s stolen from her mother, her friends, the only life she’s ever known. How does that loss carry forward with her as the story progresses? Does she benefit at all from the move to the capital? And does she ever reconcile this initial separation?
- 7** Labor is a reoccurring theme in *The Volcano Daughters*? What characters are more defined by the work that they do? What are their circumstances and how much autonomy do they have over the conditions of their labor? Is there anyone in this book who seems to find greater fulfillment in the work they do at any point? If so, what allows for that?

THESE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WERE CREATED BY THE PUBLISHER PANTHEON AND ARE NOT AFFILIATED WITH BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY.

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS!

- 8** On page 10, Balibrera writes: “We were of our mothers.” Much later, on page 330, she says: “Mothers are the invention of necessity. Necessity is the mother of invention.” There’s a strong theme of womanhood and motherhood in this novel, of communities of women and the stories of women. Where do we see those communities thrive? What compromises them? Why is it so important to our narrators to share the stories of the women they grew up with, of their mothers and grandmothers?
- 9** When Consuelo and Graciela flee El Salvador, they leave behind a militant dictatorship on the rise. Where do we see politics interact with their lives from that point forward? What freedom do they attain in leaving El Salvador, and how do the politics of the places they end up present them with new challenges?
- 10** Writing a book, telling a story, is an act of creation. How is the creative impulse, the drive to make art, to share narrative and perspective, brought to life in these pages? Who are the creators? Do their creations give them power?

THESE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WERE CREATED BY THE PUBLISHER PANTHEON AND ARE NOT AFFILIATED WITH BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY.

BONUS CONTENT

Read about Salvadorans in New York:

- [“SalviYorkers: The Story of Salvadorans in New York City”](#) (Bklyner. 2020).

Visit Salvadoran restaurants in Brooklyn and Queens:

- Bahia (690 Grand St / Brooklyn, NY 11211)
- Mexsalvador (722 5th Ave / Brooklyn, NY 11215)
- Salvatoria Kitchen & Bar (31-18 Broadway / Astoria, NY 11106)
- Ricas Pupusas & Mas (47-55 47th St / Woodside, NY 11377)
- Pupusería Izalco (64-05 Roosevelt Ave / Woodside, NY 11377)

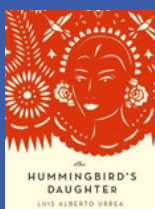
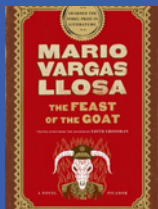


Photo by [Esaú Fuentes González](#) on [Unsplash](#)

BKLYN BOOKMATCH READALIKES

Did you enjoy *The Volcano Daughters*? Want to read something similar? Check out these readalike titles below.

- *The Feast of the Goat* by Mario Vargas Llosa
- *The Hummingbird's Daughter* by Luis Alberto Urrea
- *Slash and Burn* by Claudia Hernandez
- *My Name Is Emilia Del Valle* by Isabel Allende
- *Malas* by Marcela Fuentes



YOU CAN ACCESS THE LIST AND PLACE HOLDS ON THESE TITLES IN MULTIPLE FORMATS THROUGH THE BPL CATALOG: [DISCOVER.BKLYNLIBRARY.ORG](https://discover.bklynlibrary.org)



IN THE MOOD FOR SOMETHING ELSE? GET CUSTOMIZED READING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY'S FREE BKLYN BOOKMATCH SERVICE: [BKLYNLIBRARY.ORG/BOOKMATCH](https://bklynlibrary.org/bookmatch)