A Long Petal of the Sea

By Isabel Allende

**About the Author:**

Born in Peru and raised in Chile, Isabel Allende is the author of The House of the Spirits, Daughter of Fortune, Paula, My Invented Country and The Japanese Lover. Her books have been translated into more than 35 languages and have sold over 65 million copies worldwide. The Japanese Lover was an international and New York Times bestseller. She lives in California.

**About the Book:**

In the late 1930s, civil war grips Spain. When General Franco and his Fascists succeed in overthrowing the government, hundreds of thousands are forced to flee in a treacherous journey over the mountains to the French border. Among them is Roser, a pregnant young widow, who finds her life intertwined with that of Victor Dalmau, an army doctor and the brother of her deceased love. In order to survive, the two must unite in a marriage neither of them desires.

Together with two thousand other refugees, Roser and Victor embark for Chile on the SS Winnipeg, a ship chartered by the poet Pablo Neruda: “the long petal of sea and wine and snow.” As unlikely partners, the couple embraces exile as the rest of Europe erupts in world war. Starting over on a new continent, they face trial after trial, but they will also find joy as they patiently await the day when they might go home. Through it all, their hope of returning to Spain keeps them going. Destined to witness the battle between freedom and repression as it plays out across the world, Roser and Victor will find that home might have been closer than they thought all along.

Discussion Questions:

1. Victor and Roser face a turbulent escape from Spain and endure extraordinary challenges before they finally secure passage to safety in Chile. What characteristics do they possess that allow them to overcome these difficulties? How do their strengths complement each other, and how does this dynamic serve them later in their lives?
2. Why do you think Victor refuses to tell Roser or Carme about Guillem’s death until after Marcel is born? Do you agree with his choice?
3. In order to gain a spot on the SS Winnipeg, Victor and Roser must marry. Were you surprised by this drastic measure? As husband and wife, what obligations do you think they owe to each other in these unusual circumstances?
4. The Delmaus and the del Solars are in vastly different social classes but are thrust together due to their circumstances. How are the tensions of war experienced differently by the two families?
5. When Felipe visits a pregnant Ofelia, she says, “Being a woman is a misfortune.” What does she mean? What does this say about her attitude towards motherhood? How does her view of womanhood differ from Roser’s?
6. Many romances appear over the course of the novel. What are the different ways in which the characters approach the concept of love? Was there a particular relationship that stood out to you?
7. In his poetry, Pablo Neruda captures the anxiety, grief, and joy of a generation of Chileans. In what ways do you think his poetry is meaningful to the immigrants to Chile? How did the incorporation of Neruda’s poetry as chapter openers affect your reading experience?
8. How does the phrase “history repeats itself ” apply to the events of the novel? Do you think the characters’ previous experiences prepare them to face the reoccurrences?
9. We eventually learn that Carme abandons Roser and Aitor Ibarra so that she would not be a burden to them. How might have things turned out differently if she hadn’t left?
10. For most of their lives, Victor and Roser are outsiders as they take on the roles of exiles, refugees, and immigrants. Can you think of a time when you have felt like an outsider? Were you welcomed or pushed away? Has reading about Victor and Roser influenced the way you view outsiders to your own culture or community?
11. The historical context of the novel has a major influence over the course of the characters’ lives—from the fallout of the Spanish Civil War to the outbreak of World War II to the overthrow of the government in Chile. Were you surprised to learn about any of these historical events or the ways in which they were interconnected?
12. The book’s title comes from Pablo Neruda’s description of Chile as “a long petal of sea and wine and snow . . . with a belt of black and white foam.” What does this reveal about Chile as a country and as a culture? If you were to describe your home in poetic language, what would you say?