



Discussion Guide for *Salty, Bitter, Sweet*

By MAYRA CUEVAS

1) At the start of the book, Isabelle is completely focused on perfecting every step of her cooking, even though her dad praises her souffles, and uses Julia Child's twenty-eight attempts as her personal scorecard for getting it "right." How much of this pressure do you think is part of Isa's nature, and how much do you feel is due to her perceptions of what makes a good chef?

2) Throughout the book, Isabelle faces a lot of emotional highs and lows—losing her Lala, dealing with her parents' divorce, and trying to figure out how she fits in both at home and in the internship kitchen. What struggle seems to be the biggest for Isa in the book? What passages support your opinion?

3) Isa, Poppy, and Lucia are all passionate about cooking, but each has a different view on what it takes—and what you need to give up—if you're a woman to succeed both professionally and personally. Which girl did you most agree with? And what advice would YOU give to each one if you could?

Follow up: Do you think it is even possible for a woman to "have it all" in today's world? Why or why not? And are there things worth giving up in order to succeed?

4) At first, Isa says she cannot stand Diego. What was your first impression of him? How did that impression change as the book went on? Do you feel he and Isa are a good match long-term? Discuss why you came to your conclusion.

5) When Isa meets one of her culinary heroes, Chef Legrande, her view of the kitchen—and how to win the internship—begins to shift. What did you think of Legrande's advice? (Also think back to when Isabelle helped Lucia butcher the chicken and was told by Chef Troissant that the apprenticeship isn't a team sport.) Would you have done the same as Isa (be honest with yourself) when Lucia asked about the onions?

6) Lala was a huge factor in Isabelle's life. How do Isa's memories of Lala help flavor the story? How did reading those chapters make you feel, in contrast to reading the chapters in the internship kitchen? And whose food would you rather eat—Lala's or the French dishes Isabelle has to make—and why?

7) After accidentally getting drunk with Chef Troissant, Isa is much more open and free with Diego. Do you think Diego and Isa ever would have gotten together if that night had never happened? Discuss with other readers.

8) Isa’s relationship with her dad and Margo shifts after Isa returns from Spain. What did you think of how Margo’s attitude toward Isa changed, and did you feel Margo’s rationale for being so distant made sense? What about her dad’s reasons for the affair and leaving for France? And with Isa’s relationship with her dad mended, how do you think things will be between Isa and her mom going forward? With her Maman?

9) At the end of the book, which breakthrough felt the most important for Isa to have—her decision to focus on love and family, or her decision on what type of career she wants to have in the cooking world? Do you think Isa’s solution to “have it all” was in her heart all along and just something she was denying, or was it something that happened as a result of what she saw and who she met in France and Spain?

10) Throughout the book, how food makes us feel is a big part of the plot—from Lala’s apple pie to coq au vin to fortune cookies to delicious baked goods at a local shop. What dish or dessert from your life is the most meaningful to you? Share with your group, including any memories or stories tied to that food you are comfortable talking about. Also think about having a potluck share at your next book group so others can make new food memories too!

Let us know what you think!

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