

The background of the cover features a close-up of a woman's face with dark, wavy hair, looking slightly to the left. The image is framed by vibrant pink roses and green leaves in the corners. The text is overlaid on the woman's hair.

VIOLETA

BOOK CLUB KIT

ISABEL  
ALLENDE



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did you think about Violeta as a character? How did she evolve throughout the course of the book? Which period of her life was the most interesting to you? Did you learn anything from her story?
2. Violeta tells her story in the form of a letter, a practice inspired by Isabel Allende's own correspondence with her mother, Panchita. Since Allende was 16, she and her mother would write letters almost daily when they were apart, each writing one half of a shared monologue that recorded their lives. What does the epistolary style add to the overall effect of the novel?
3. The novel is bookended by two pandemics. Did that timeline encourage you to examine what it means to live during and through such times more closely? What does it take to keep going when the world is filled with turmoil and unease?
4. Allende chooses to leave the country unnamed in *Violeta*, though scenes in the novel are inspired by historical events in the region and Allende's life—such as military coups and dictatorships, the 1918 flu pandemic, The Great Depression, the Women's Rights movement, etc. Why do you think she made this choice? How did the open-ended setting impact your reading experience?
5. Violeta experiences different kinds and stages of love—expressed through family, security, passion, grief, kinship, tolerance, acceptance, and good humor. Discuss Violeta's various relationships. How does Allende capture the ways we love? In what ways does our capacity for love change over time?
6. Violeta says, "It was clear to me from a young age that although I respected them, my mother and my aunts were stuck in the past, uninterested in the outside world or anything that might challenge their beliefs." Discuss the ways different generations approach feminism.
7. *Violeta* is filled with playful, witty humor. What scenes or moments made you laugh? What does humor add to the overall effect of the story?
8. Violeta's Aunt Pia observes, "Better a boring husband than an unreliable one." Do you agree? Do you think passion or loyalty is more important for a good marriage?
9. Memory is a major theme in this novel, made up of the unexpected events that make a life. Sometimes it's a blessing and sometimes it's a curse, as Violeta says. Discuss how the book explores memory.
10. In the last chapter, Allende writes, "There's a time to live and time to die. In between there's time to remember." How did this book make you reflect on your own life? What did you take away from reading it?







# Q & A with ISABEL ALLENDE on *Violeta*

**Q:** You have mentioned that some elements of the novel are inspired by events in your family history, and specifically your mother's life—can you expand on this?

**A:** When my mother died, three years ago, many people suggested that I write about her life. I couldn't. I was too close to her, I had no distance or perspective to see her as a character. She did not have an exceptional life, but she lived almost a century, a fascinating century of great changes for humanity; in her correspondence with me, she recorded most of it. Violeta is physically, emotionally, and intellectually like my mother, she belongs to the same generation and social class, but she had a different fate. Unfortunately, she was never financially independent. That would have made such a huge difference in her life!!

**Q:** You have talked about the beautiful relationship you had with your mother. Is it correct that you wrote to her every day from 1986 until she died? Can you tell us a bit more?

**A:** I was separated from my mother when I was 16 years old. She was in Turkey with my stepfather, who was a diplomat, and I was in Chile at my grandfather's house. We started writing to each other almost every day. The letters took weeks to reach us but it didn't matter, it was not a conversation, it was a shared uninterrupted monologue. We were separated most of our lives and we kept the long habit of the daily letter. I saved her letters and copies of most of mine. Recently my son decided to archive dozens of boxes with that insane correspondence. He calculated that I have 24,000 letters.

**Q:** Is there something of yourself in the character of Violeta?

**A:** I heard once that all characters are part of the author. I don't know if that's true. I have hundreds of characters in 26 books and I don't think any of them are based on me. But obviously my values, memories, demons, and angels are in all of them, even in the villains. (Maybe mostly in the villains...) Violeta is strong and independent, like all my female protagonists. Is that something of myself? Probably.

**Q:** You have said that the character of Camilo was inspired by your best friend, who is a Jesuit priest. Please could you tell us a bit more about him?

**A:** His name is Felipe Berríos del Solar and the book is dedicated to him. He works with the poor in a dump in the north of Chile; his religion is about compassion, inclusion, tolerance, service, unconditional love, struggle for justice, and social change. He is full of doubts about the church, but has no doubts about his faith. In the 60s, many Catholics embraced the Liberation Theology which was about those values that Felipe embraces. The hierarchy of the Church squashed. Today the Catholic church, like most religions, is not in touch with the needs of humanity and the times we are living. And they are all, without exception, patriarchal.

## Q & A WITH ISABEL ALLENDE ON VIOLETA

**Q:** Why did you decide to leave the country in which the novel is set unnamed?

**A:** It gives me more freedom, I don't have to stick to precise dates or places. I did the same in *The House of the Spirits* and *Of Love and Shadows*. Those stories could have happened in almost any Latin American country.

**Q:** Why did you choose to bookend the novel with pandemics? How do you feel that informs other elements of the story?

**A:** Violeta lives to be a hundred years old. In her deathbed, isolated because of the pandemic, she reflects, remembers and writes to her grandson. I thought it would be poetic to place her century between the two pandemics. Now that we are living under Covid-19 we can easily imagine what the influenza pandemic was a century ago. So much happened in these years and here we are, in the same place. Isn't it ironic?

**Q:** Is the character of Nieves inspired by a real person?

**A:** I was married for 28 years to a man whose three children were addicts. Tragically, they all died of drug-related causes. I lived very close to addiction for a long time and I know first hand how devastating it is for the patient, the family, and everybody else around. Nieves is inspired by Jennifer, Willie's only daughter, who died very young, shortly after giving birth.

**Q:** Love is a recurrent theme in your books and lately you have written a lot about love at an old age. Can you talk about that?

**A:** I am an invincible romantic. I have been in love always since age seven to this day. So no wonder love appears constantly in my writing. I believe it is the most powerful force in the world, in different ways, it moves everything in nature. In my old age—I will be 80 this year 2022—I value love more than ever. I am often asked how it is to love at this stage. It's like falling in love in our youth but with more patience, tolerance, good humor, and a sense that we have very little time left. We have to enjoy it. That's what Violeta does in her old age, when she falls in love with the Norwegian birdwatcher.

**Q:** Some of the plot of *Violeta* is inspired by actual historical events—can you talk about what you hoped to achieve with this? Were you hoping to write about the impact of sweeping historical changes on individual lives?

**A:** I have written several historical novels, so I have become keenly interested in the past and how it shapes the present. My characters are not detached from the real world, the social and political events impact their lives. My own life has been determined by external events that I could not control. I can't narrate my own life without referring to those circumstances. In the same way, I can't create believable characters—complex and contradictory as real people are—without describing the time and the place where they live.



# RECIPES



# DULCE DE LECHE AND WALNUT SPONGE CAKE



## INGREDIENTS

### For the sponge cakes:

- 6 oz. ground, toasted walnuts
- ½ cup white sugar
- ¼ cup flour
- 4 eggs
- 1 egg yolk

### For the meringue:

- 3 egg whites
- 2 ½ tablespoons white sugar
- ¼ tsp. vanilla extract
- Pinch of salt

### To decorate:

- 24 oz. dulce de leche
- 2 cups chopped walnuts

## DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Prepare two 9-inch round baking tins by covering the bottom with a circle of wax paper.
3. In a mixing bowl, whisk the eggs, the yolk and the sugar to the ribbon stage. Fold in the flour and ground walnuts.
4. Meanwhile, make the meringue by whisking the egg whites on high speed until fluffy. Add a pinch of salt and the vanilla. Change to low speed and sprinkle in the sugar. Whisk on high speed for 5 minutes until you obtain a firm, glossy meringue.
5. Carefully add one-third of the meringue to the walnut and egg mixture. Slowly fold in the remaining two-thirds to prevent the mixture from deflating.
6. Divide mixture between the prepared baking tins. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes until the cakes are dry to the touch and golden on the surface. Allow cakes to cool, then remove from the baking tins.
7. Place a little dulce de leche on the plate where the cake will be assembled. Add the first sponge cake and cover with a layer of dulce de leche and sprinkle with chopped walnuts. Top with the second cake, then covering the whole cake with dulce de leche and walnuts.
8. Allow to rest overnight.

[tastemade.com/videos/dulce-de-leche-and-walnut-sponge-cake/](https://tastemade.com/videos/dulce-de-leche-and-walnut-sponge-cake/)





# CAFÉ ISABEL



## INGREDIENTS

- ¾ cup of black coffee
- ⅓ cup of milk (any kind)
- 1 tablespoon of Khalúa
- 1 scoop of vanilla ice cream
- Ice
- Whipped cream
- Additional sugar to taste (optional)

## DIRECTIONS

1. Pour the coffee in a tall glass, add some ice ( up to 1/4 of the glass), add the milk, and the Khalúa. Stir once.
2. Add the scoop of ice cream and garnish the top with whipped cream. You can also add a cherry or sprinkle cinnamon or chocolate powder.







BALLANTINE  
BOOKS

