



My Invented Country

By Isabel Allende
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Introduction

In *My Invented Country*, Isabel Allende recalls the lost world of her roots, a version of Chile that vanished when General Pinochet's military junta erupted on September 11, 1973. Her uncle, President Salvador Allende Gossens, was assassinated in the coup. The social climate that had permitted her candid journalism was replaced by a brutal dictatorship.

Offering an evocative tour of Allende's often misunderstood homeland, *My Invented Country* transports us to compelling locales, while capturing the tumultuous events that led Allende to recognize her storytelling gifts.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are your initial impressions of Chile as Isabel Allende presents it in her opening scenes? Does the landscape correspond to its inhabitants? In what ways does Allende's persona reflect this geography?
2. The book's title reminds us of the subjectivity of memory. What recollections of your hometown might be shaped by your unique point of view? How would you describe your "invented" place of origin?
3. Allende describes herself as a charismatic woman who speaks frankly, wears bold colors, and savors her meals without worrying about cholesterol. Do these traits make her more of an exception in California or in Chile?
4. Allende powerfully recalls the aftermath of the September 11 military coup that launched Pinochet's reign of terror in 1973. She describes the fallout in personal terms: families torn apart by informants, a nation's faith in its electorate shaken, a vibrant cultural climate replaced by one of suppression. Discuss the parallels and distinctions between the trauma of Chile's 9/11 events and those that occurred in the United States exactly 28 years later.
5. What did *My Invented Country* reveal about Chilean attitudes towards sexism, racism and political correctness? How might this memoir have shifted had the author been male, or mestizo?
6. Relatives -- particularly grandparents -- played a distinctive role in shaping Allende's sense of self and inspiring much of her fiction. She even maintains an almost daily correspondence with her mother. Which of your relatives most heavily influenced your character, and your sense of imagination?
7. Allende writes that Chilean status was not heavily tied to wealth before the Pinochet years, but in contemporary Chile the ruling class is extremely affluent -- possibly at the expense of a once-sizeable middle class. Is this situation uniquely Chilean, or do you believe that the 1970s and 1980s were marked by similar economic shifts around the world?
8. *My Invented Country* is as much travelogue as memoir. What did you discover about the distinctions between various countries of South America, particularly Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Venezuela? How does Allende's South America compare to the other locales she has lived in, such as the Middle East and Europe?
9. Allende's fiction often features characters who have unusual perceptions of reality, or are able to tap spiritual worlds as easily as tangible ones. Does *My Invented Country* evoke any of these themes? In what way does it complete the memories recorded in her memoir *Paula*?
10. Did the book change your perception of your American identity?

About the Author

Born in Peru, Isabel Allende was raised in Chile. She is the author of the novels *Portrait in Sepia*, *Daughters of Fortune*, *The Infinite Plan*, *Eva Luna*, *Of Love and Shadows* and *The House of Spirits*, the short story collection *The Stories of Eva Luna*, and the memoirs *Paula*, *Aphrodite*, and *My Invented Country*. She is also the author of *City of the Beasts* and *Kingdom of the Golden Dragon*, the first two in what will be a trilogy of children's novels. She lives in California.